NZECP34 Frequently Asked Questions

This information sheet addresses the most commonly asked questions that we receive in the context of close approach consents and related inquiries. The approaches we have described below are in many cases mandated by law and have been carefully considered in the interest of public and workers' safety. We are not able to alter them.

NZECP34 Applicability

Can my site be exempted from the requirements of NZECP34?

NZECP34 is a legally enforceable Code of Practice under the Electricity Act 1992 and Electricity (Safety) Regulations 2010. As a result, it applies consistently across all sites.

Building and site owners, along with those involved in building works, are responsible for ensuring that buildings and structures maintain the required clearances from existing powerlines. This applies regardless of whether resource or building consents have been issued.

Scaffold Considerations

A scaffold is only a temporary structure; is it subject to NZECP34 Section 3?

Scaffolding is considered a structure under NZECP34 and is therefore subject to Section 3, *Safe Distances Between Conductors and Buildings (and Other Structures)*.

Although scaffolds are temporary, they can still present significant safety risks when located near powerlines. Ensuring that scaffolds maintain the required safe distances helps protect workers using the scaffold, as well as members of the public in the surrounding area, throughout the duration of the work.

Why do scaffolds near powerlines need to have at least 450mm of clear access?

When building work happens near live overhead powerlines, there needs to be enough space for people to move and work safely. A scaffold platform that has at least 450mm of clear access gives workers stable footing and room to work.

This width is based on WorkSafe guidance. As the owner of the electricity network, Vector applies this standard to help keep everyone safe.

What if my site doesn't have room for a scaffold platform with 450mm clear access?

If there isn't enough space on your site to meet the 450mm requirement, changes will need to be made before construction can go ahead near Vector's powerlines.

That could mean adjusting the design of the building or engaging Vector on a remedy for the powerlines. These options help make sure the job can be done safely.

Because safety comes first, Vector isn't able to issue a close approach consent for construction works near powerlines where a scaffold platform does not have 450mm of clear access.

De-energising Lines to Facilitate Construction

Can we have the powerlines turned off to finish construction or to set up a scaffold?

No, Vector does not allow the de-energisation of powerlines to facilitate the construction of new buildings.

If you have found yourself in a situation where you have constructed or partially constructed a non-compliant building, you will be required to either pay for modifications to the electricity network or will need to pay for de-energisation of the power lines and generation for all impacted customers while you deconstruct your building.

Mobile Plant

Can we use mobile plant, i.e., a scissor lift, instead of a scaffold?

It is typically not within our safety and risk management appetite to issue close approach consents for the use of mobile plant as a long term substitute for a scaffold to facilitate construction near our live powerlines. This is for two reasons:

1. Even when being used with restricted movement, i.e., vertical only, the mobile plant may be physically close to the framing and exterior of the building, which impedes its movement and potentially makes it a closer equivalent to a structure. Therefore, in Vector's view, mobile plant should be subject to the minimum distances specified under Table 3.
2. When being used with unrestricted movement, there is a significant risk of operator error that could result in the person operating the mobile plant more closely approaching the live powerlines than is safe.

Insulation Status of Powerlines

The powerlines appear to be covered or insulated; which Table 3 distances apply?

The bare or covered distances apply.

Regardless of the actual insulation status of our powerlines at the time these were manufactured, we treat all our lines as non-insulated or bare for the safety of all closely approaching our powerlines.

Vector only purchases covered conductor, not insulated conductor. Therefore, while the conductor appears to be insulated, it is in fact only covered and cannot be relied upon to provide any sort of insulation.

Can we apply insulation such as Tiger Tails to the lines to apply the insulated distances of Table 3?

No, Vector does not permit the use of insulation/tiger tails on our powerlines to facilitate a close approach. This is for several reasons:

(a) We are not aware of any certification or the like on any commonly available covers that guarantees their long-term insulation performance;

(b) Engineering controls are well-recognised as non-preferred risk controls in eliminating or mitigating risks posed by hazards. Other risk controls should be prioritised; and

(c) From Vector's perspective, covers are only effective in providing protection against incidental brush contact with powerlines whilst workers are wearing electrically rated protective clothing.

Network Modification

How much will it cost to make changes to the electricity network?

The cost for changes to the network are highly dependent on the works required and where the works are located (traffic management costs differ significantly based on location). Therefore, we are unable to readily provide an indication of cost. A free high level estimate can be obtained at your request by contacting our team.

Why were certain engineering solutions not suggested for my site?

Engineering solutions are very particular to specific assets and sites and public and worker safety is always our top priority. If a particular solution was not suggested, it will be because it is not feasible.

Vertical Clearances

What structures are counted as “normally accessible” vs. “not normally accessible to persons but on which a person can stand”?

Decks and scaffold platforms are considered normally accessible and therefore must apply the more conservative clearances found in row A of Table 3.

Roofs in their finished state are considered not normally accessible and can therefore apply the smaller vertical clearances found in row B of Table 3.

Existing Works Rights

A powerline or power pole is in my property without an easement; can Vector remove it?

Section 22 of the Electricity Act 1992 provides that all “existing works” (i.e. electricity distribution network equipment installed before 1 January 1993) lawfully fixed to or installed on any private land not belonging to the works owner are nonetheless entitled to remain.

Service Lines

Who is responsible for the service line?

Service lines are typically the responsibility of the property owner from the point where the line crosses the boundary into the property it supplies. Please note that there may be exceptions to this rule of thumb, and you should always confirm these details with Vector before making the decision that it is the responsibility of others.

If the service line crosses another private property before entering the property it supplies, under the Electricity Act 1992 this is considered "works" and it is a distribution line that Vector owns, beginning from the pole, over the berm, and inclusive of the section of that line that crosses over the propert(ies) that it does not supply. Again, you should always confirm these details with Vector before making the decision that it is owned by others.

Do I need to follow Section 3 for service lines?

Yes, you must maintain safe distances from service lines.

Service line owners do not have the ability to exempt you from NZECP34 requirements.

If you do not have the service line owner’s permission to closely approach their line, you must maintain the minimum distance of 4 meters at all stages of construction, as indicated in WorkSafe’s Working near low voltage overhead electric lines.

Please note: the service line must maintain Table 3 distances (at a minimum) throughout the lifetime of the line and the building. If the line cannot maintain Table 3 distances at any point, construction must not proceed.