

TO: MEUW Members

FROM: David J. Benforado, Executive Director

DATE: February 4, 2009

RE: Update on Use of Buckingham Bucksqueeze Belts by Electric Line Personnel.

For those MEUW Member utilities that purchased Buckingham Bucksqueeze belts earlier this year for use by their electric line personnel, there have been some developments that you may have heard about and that you should be aware of.

Recommended Action

MEUW Safety Staff, in consultation with Tom Bushman (Two Rivers), Chair, MEUW Safety & Education Committee, recommend that MEUW Member utilities that purchased Buckingham Bucksqueeze belts:

1. Perform daily visual inspections of this climbing equipment (as you would with all other climbing equipment), looking for abnormalities, cracks, making sure that the D-ring locks properly, that the belt is not chewed up, and so on; and
2. Make sure that electric line personnel who have these belts know how to use them properly. Each utility that purchased Buckingham Bucksqueeze belts received written instructions and a video from the manufacturer that shows proper use of the equipment. Review the video with your line personnel, and then allow your personnel the time to practice using the equipment.

Background

Last week Tuesday, a We Energies employee who is training to be a trainer for instructing other We Energies line personnel on proper use of the Buckingham Bucksqueeze slid down the pole (10-12 ft drop) during a practice session (a hard landing but no injuries to report), and upon inspection of his equipment, he found a broken weld on the carabineer of the Bucksqueeze strap.

We Energies immediately engaged Buckingham to help determine whether the cause was equipment failure or human error and shipped the belt in question overnight to Buckingham for testing. In addition, We Energies suspended all employee use of the Bucksqueeze until further notice. Based on the We Energies incident, Alliant Energy issued a safety alert earlier this week to all of its line personnel instructing them not to use the Buckingham Bucksqueeze until further notice.

Last week Thursday, Buckingham reported to We Energies that after extensive testing (seven drops using like weight dummies, one at 170 pds and one at 250 pds), they determined that the belt that We Energies sent to them worked fine. Buckingham videotaped the cut out tests (one with dummies and the other with a Buckingham employee, see links below). Last week Friday, Buckingham completed stress tests on the carabineer assemblies that We Energies had sent to

Buckingham for examination, and reported that each stood up to roughly 3,000 lbs before breaking, much more than they would ever be subject to in real life.

On this past Tuesday, Buckingham issued the following statement on the matter:

*At Buckingham Manufacturing, we take customer complaints seriously. When we were made aware of an alleged Bucksqueeze failure, naturally we became very concerned. We received the belt in question and have performed seven drop tests and a live cutout simulation. The tests included the belt both in and out of adjustment and using various lengths of green webbing simulating different distances away from the pole. The maximum distance the Bucksqueeze slipped on the pole in any of these tests was 3". In summary, it passed even the most severe tests easily. In addition, we performed bend tests on two carabineer connector assemblies that were returned to us for suspected cracks in the welds. The results of these tests were also satisfactory. The design of this assembly is such that even in the event the weld fails, the carabineer and connector could not separate keeping the user safely on the pole. Although it is impossible to determine the exact cause of the fall without having witnessed it, **it is our determination that it was not the result of a broken weld on the carabineer connector assembly.** The Bucksqueeze, when properly used provides a much higher degree of safety over free climbing or hitch hiking. This is proven by all the tests performed as well as the many recorded saves. In conclusion, Buckingham is committed to manufacturing the safest most reliable products for individuals working at heights. Feel free to contact us at 800 937 2825 should you have any questions regarding the Bucksqueeze or any of our other products. To request a complete test report and DVD's illustrating all tests performed, contact our customer service department. Follow the link below to view drop test and cutout simulation videos of the actual unit returned to us:*

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N67Q3KuO55Y> (a videotape of one of the dummy cut out test drops using the We Energies belt); and
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mjVgCoeZrG0> (a videotape of a cut out test by a Buckingham employee using the We Energies belt)."

If you have questions regarding this matter, please consult with MEUW Safety Directors John Boogren or Jeff Vonau, or give me a call. We'll keep you apprised as we learn more.

Many thanks.