Helicopters give easier, convenient access to towers

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An Entergy contractor attaches a safety line after being transported to the top of a transmission tower by helicopter to make repairs and upgrade equipment.

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Helicopters give easier, convenient access to towers By Brad Meyer Houston Community Newspapers | 0 comments

When it comes to doing maintenance work atop a 12-story-tall tower, sometimes it’s easier to drop down than to climb.

For workers performing upgrades and maintenance work on Entergy’s local transmission line towers in Conroe recently, the quickest way to the jobsite is by taking a helicopter to the top.

“In most cases we’ll use lift trucks and conventional means of getting to power lines,” said Amy Hensarling, Entergy project manager. “But in wetland areas and locations where access is limited by the environment, we use helicopters to get workers to the tops of transmission towers.”

That’s the case in recent days as Entergy work crews and contractors have been busy upgrading equipment and replacing static wires with fiber optic cables on transmission towers in the Conroe area.

“It’s more common to see helicopters used to transport workers in the Gulf area,” said Hensarling, “but we’ve had occasion to use them in Conroe as well.”

The objective is to upgrade electrical systems and capabilities in Montgomery County. Older electromechanical relays are being replaced by digital equipment that is faster and more reliable.

“The fiber optic cable also allows for better communication between Entergy resources,” added Larry Daspit, Entergy transmission spokesman. “The transmission towers handle a lot more than just electrical power.”

The upgrade being performed in phases throughout Montgomery County also allows electrical service redundancy – enabling power to be delivered to customers from multiple directions instead of an inline, linear fashion. In the event of failure or downed line, the upgrade will help Entergy restore service to a given area more quickly and efficiently.

Crews working from helicopters have special safety procedures to protect them when working on transmission towers that range from 85- to 125-feet in height.

“Fall protection is major issue for workmen being delivered to the tops of towers,” said Hensarling. “They do not release from the helicopter safety line until they are buckled on to a tower safety line.”

Daspit noted that workmen use special wishbone safety harness mechanisms that separate from the helicopter automatically in the event of an emergency situation.

“We also de-energize the lines and deliver power through alternative lines when workmen are on top of the towers whenever possible,” said Hensarling. “It’s possible to do it with the power on, but we opt for safety.”

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