Arc flashes can easily cause Pennsylvania workplace burn injuries

A bright flash at a Pennsylvania workplace can prove deadly especially when proper electricity controls are not in place. An arc flash happens when an electrical current leaves its designated path and connects with the ground or travels from one conductor to another. Electric shock injuries when a worker is near an arc flash can cause serious burns and even death.

In neighboring New York, a worker recently suffered burns in an electrical arc flash accident. The incident happened during routine maintenance on 34,500 volt electrical switches.

The Occupational Health and Safety Administration investigated the electrical contractor and found that proper tagging and barricading procedures were not in place to limit employee exposure to live electrical parts. The agency noted 14 serious violations by the contractor including failure to provide adequate personal protective clothing and training.

Causes and severity of injury

While the example above is maybe the most common cause of an arc flash, they can also be caused by dropping tools, dust, corrosion and condensation. The severity of an injury generally relates to three factors:

- How close the worker was to the arc flash
- The time it takes for a circuit to break; and
- Temperature

Often these injuries are so severe that extended medical care is required and full recovery is rare. The heat released in an

arc flash can result in serious burns to the skin. Flying objects, including molten metal, might even cause injuries to those located farther away. Sound blasts can damage hearing as well.

When an injury occurs in the course of employment in Pennsylvania, workers’ compensation benefits are generally available.