

Potentially lethal electric fences are now legal

While it isn't uncommon to have a dispute with your neighbours, they aren't normally quite as threatening as ours.

As you have previously noted in articles regarding electric fences, the Australian Standard indicated a maximum pulse voltage of 10kV and maximum pulse energy of 5 joules. But this has been recently changed. The 10kV limit remains but the latest standards no longer specify a limit on the energy delivered by a single pulse.

As a result, electric fence energisers delivering 50J or more are now available. I guess this is to allow long electric fences of many kilometres. Unfortunately, this has led to at least one death in Deloraine, Tasmania, not far from my property.

It seems that the logic behind the new Australian safety standard AS/NZS 3014 for the construction of electric fences is that the person will only get one shock and be thrown clear.

Electric fence wires should not be mixed with barbed wire, with a minimum distance of 150mm between them and the electric fence should not be near an object which could prevent the victim from moving away from the fence if shocked. The standard also states that the fence must be clearly labelled and also provides limitations on interference with phones etc.

My neighbour's fence breaks

all of the above requirements (see photo below). That fence is not what prompted me to write this e-mail but it just happens to have been installed recently. Despite its lethality, I have not been able to have this wire removed.

I have had workplace inspectors out here but they don't have any authority over the matter. The electrical standards and safety inspector (the same one who investigated the death at Deloraine) said if it was included in the standards associated with AS3000, he could do something. Note that this would require an electrical contractor to install the fences.

It appears it is a local council matter. Sheffield local council does not enforce compliance with Australian National Standards. My question is how many deaths or serious injuries does it take to get something done? The fence shown injured my fit 8-year old horse. She was still sweating and shaking the next morning, 10 hours after receiving the shock.

Name withheld on request.

Comment: we are very concerned about the increase in pulse energy which now seems to be permitted. However, we have been unable to determine if there have been any deaths or injuries as a direct result of the change.

We contacted the Justice Department in Tasmania about this and the death you referred to appears to have occurred more than 10 years ago. Two horses were also killed in the north west of Tasmania some time in 2014 but again, this may have been because of an illegal fence installation rather than the specific energy in the discharge pulse.

The fence installation in your photo certainly seems to be quite dangerous and should be removed.

