

# Frequently Asked Questions – NZECP34 Section 3

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?

No, NZECP34 is a legally enforceable Code of Practice under the Electricity Act 1992 and Electricity (Safety) Regulations 2010.

It is always incumbent on the building or site owner and those involved in building works to ensure that any buildings and/or structures maintain the required separation from pre-existing powerlines. This applies regardless of the issue of any resource and building consents.

## Scaffold is a Structure

A scaffold is only a temporary structure, is it exempt from NZECP34 Section 3?

No, temporary or not, a scaffold is a structure and therefore cannot be exempted from NZECP34 Section 3 – Safe Distances Between Conductors and Buildings (and Other Structures).

While scaffolds will eventually be removed, their existence near powerlines introduces a significant risk for not only workers on the scaffold but also members of the public passing by if the scaffold cannot maintain safe distances from the powerlines.

## Insulation Status of Powerlines

The powerlines appear to be covered or insulated, does this mean we can apply the insulated distances of Table 3?

No, 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. So, 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.

## 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.

## De-energising Lines to Facilitate Construction

Can we have the lines turned off to finish construction? / Can we have the lines turned off 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. 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.

## Service Lines

Who owns the service line?

Service lines are typically owned by 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 owned by 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 property(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.

Per NZECP34 section 3.2.1.3, if you are unable to maintain Table 2 distances from the service line, you must obtain an engineering assessment. If the building and/or scaffold cannot comply with Table 3 requirements to the service line, construction is prohibited. If the building and/or scaffold can comply with Table 3 requirements to the service line, you must obtain permission from the service line owner prior to beginning construction.

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.

## 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 what works are 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.

## Existing Works Rights

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

To the extent that any of our powerlines or poles are within the boundaries of your property, 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 at the election of the works owner.

Under section 23, Vector has the right to inspect, maintain and operate existing works. “Maintenance” in this context is given an extended definition that provides for the ability of the works owner to replace or upgrade existing works, so long as no additional objective diminishment of land value is caused by the works beyond the impediments already imposed by the existing assets.