

Grand Coulee's Towers of Power

Chris Vick: We decided about 5 years ago to overhaul our 6 main generating units in the 3rd Powerplant. One of the pre-projects that we needed to complete was new overhead lines. We discovered that our current lines, which run through the dam up the hillside to the spreading yard, were starting to bulge and show age-related signs of deterioration. So we decided to go forward, design the new overhead line project and we're currently in the construction phase of that project.

Reclamation approached Bonneville Power Administration to help with the design and construction oversight of this project. They are the true experts in tower design and tower construction. They're doing a great job for us.... And then the contractor, Wilson Construction, is also doing a terrific job.....

Chad Devine: Today we're erecting this river-crossing gladdis tower. It's going to be supporting the conductor crossing the river to the dam. And in order to keep clearance above the Columbia River, that's why they're so high here. We're going to be a little above 300 feet with these towers.

[machine noise]

It's grueling. I mean they're beating drift pins and spud wrenches to get the steel to make, to get the holes to line up. They're climbing around in awkward spots. A lot of times, they've got to stand on ropes. They've got vice grips up there... bull pins....

When they're ascending or descending, typically they're not tied in. It's kind of preference at that point. But when they get to a working position, you always safety off. We always either safety off with a lanyard or with your climbing belt. But until they get to a working position, they're on their own up there. It's a big jungle gym.

Chris Vick: It's amazing. Just watching these guys climb 300 towers... it's pretty amazing.

Tyrell Kinyon: "Got it"

Chad Devine: They don't lose tools. They've got tethers on everything they've got up there. Tethers to their belts.... You know, from time to time something may accidentally come out of the air but for the most part, everybody's got tool holders and then they've also got a tether attached to it because if something does come down, you know, it could be a problem.

It's long days. They're exposed to the weather all day. I mean, we're working six twelves out here and that puts them in the tower for over 10 hours a day, generally. They earn their money. There's nothing easy about it. It takes a lot to go up there and do what those guys do.

[machine noise]