

# Highlight risks of tropical diseases

Electricity provider Ergon Energy Ltd needs to pay more attention to the risk of employees contracting tropical diseases, according to Queensland Coroner Michael Barnes.

Coroner Barnes recommended the company educate workers about the risk of contracting tropical diseases, including melioidosis, while handing down his finding into the death in 2005 of a linesman.

He found the linesman died from pneumonia as a result of exposure to melioidosis – bacteria found in soil and water in northern Australia.

The coroner ruled he was exposed to the bacteria while working in heavy rain to repair a power failure on a rural property in the Winton area.

Ergon issues all outside workers with a range of personal protective equipment, including rain-proof wear, but the linesman and a co-worker forgot to transfer the gear from one truck to another when they went to the property.

The coroner said Ergon could not be held responsible for the employees failing to wear their protective equipment, but he found

the company had not distributed information on the risk of melioidosis before the linesman's death.

He said melioidosis was endemic in the Winton area and it was likely company employees would, on occasion, come into contact with mud that would contain the bacteria.

The coroner said if the workers were aware of the risk, it was likely they would take steps to avoid contact with mud or monitor their health if they had been exposed to it to ensure quicker diagnosis of the condition.