#WeAreSPIE: A conversation with Christian Spichtinger

Our employees in focus

At SPIE we're proud of our employees and of what they do every day. In our '#WeAreSPIE: Our employees in focus' feature, we highlight our employees' personalities, stories, talents, expertise and sheer enthusiasm for technology.
Today we talk to Christian Spichtinger, an overhead line technician in the High Voltage Operational Division of SPIE Deutschland & Zentraleuropa.

Christian Spichtinger, you work as an overhead line technician at SPIE. How would you describe your everyday work?

My title, 'overhead line technician', pretty much nails it: I install and service high-voltage power lines, and my work takes me all over southern Germany. I'm usually part of a three-person team within the overall crew. To make sure everything goes smoothly, we meet in advance to discuss the workflow for each project and working day. Then one of us stays on the ground to set up the tools. That person organises the supply of materials for the climbing team, which usually has two people, and keeps an eye on them. The climbing team actually installs the overhead cables. We also maintain the cables and do things like attaching the ball-shaped visibility markers that are intended to keep planes and helicopters away from the pylons. We have to climb up the electricity pylons to get to where we need to work. That can be as far up as 80 metres.

What motivated you to become an overhead line technician?

I had vocational training as a painter/decorator and was in the army for a while. Then I began to look at other options. My father-in-law, who had worked at SPIE for a long time, arranged a trial internship for me here. It didn't take long for me to see that I was in the right place. And I could also see that this is exactly the kind of work I wanted to do. So I decided on a new beginning as a career changer at SPIE. My work as an overhead line technician is exciting, and it's different every day. And not only did SPIE give me this career change opportunity, they've also given me a lot of support and encouragement.

What do you like most about what you do at SPIE?

I work in a sector that's essential for supplying people with electricity. And I'm proud to do something that benefits everybody in the country. At SPIE I have the opportunity to actively make the energy transition a reality. To prepare for the transition, Germany is renewing its grid and expanding its capacity. Some of the electricity from renewable sources has to be transported across the country over long distances, like from the windy north to the south and west where many of the consumers and businesses are. SPIE is involved in every phase of this process. And as an overhead line technician at SPIE, I can also do my part for a climate-neutral future.
For all these reasons, of course our sector has very good prospects. I also work a lot with trained electricians and mechanics who like working on challenging and important projects in unusual places just like I do.

Are there any particular demands associated with your role?

Yes, that comes with the territory when you're working at such a height. We have to consider many things in terms of safety and check our safety equipment every day. Of course you also have to be especially careful working with high voltage. And that's not all. Like mountain climbing, working as an overhead line technician is physically demanding. We have to be fit and can't be afraid of heights. We need to be sure-footed and to have plenty of stamina and good coordination skills. Overhead line technicians need to be able to stay up there for a long time as we can't take a quick break. And you can't be fazed by the wind and the weather either. You simply have to get a grip no matter what's happening around you.

Are there any special projects you're working on?

Basically, every project and every job on high-voltage lines is exciting and demanding. But there's one project I remember especially well because I was flown very close to the power line in a basket hanging from a helicopter. From the basket, I had to attach visibility markers to the cable. I had to put my trust in the pilot's flying skills, because he had to keep the helicopter very steady in exactly the right position while I worked. That was a pretty special situation for me.