Are electric fences a serious safety risk to humans?

Because touching an electric fence is painful and the voltages are high, most assume that the risks from an energized fence must also be high.

That's a myth. Consider that millions of people throughout the world are “exposed” to millions of miles of electric fences every day—yet there is less than one death or serious injury per year worldwide—and the fence is often not the cause.

Compare that to the number of annual injuries and deaths that occur from exposure to tractors, skid loaders, ladders, PTO shafts, balers, mowers, combines, bulls, stallions, rifles, shotguns, knives, etc.

This is not to suggest that there is no risk at all. There is, indeed, a small level of risk. And with risk, there is also liability to the fence’s owner.

To reduce the risk...

1. Be especially careful not to touch an energized wire with the head or spine. For reasons not fully understood, this contact point is worse than contact with hands, arms, feet or legs.
2. Never approach a fence without footwear. And wear footwear that fully encloses the foot (not sandals). Why? Most footwear are poor conductors. So they reduce (by absorbing it) the energy that will pass through your body if you touch a fence with your hands or head.
3. Never energize barbed wire. Animals and humans can become entangled and repeatedly shocked—and thus die.
4. Hang warning signs at critical areas where children or untrained adults encounter the fence.
5. Use smaller energizers on fences located near children and untrained adults. (Most experts agree that smaller energizers are safer than large ones as long as animal control isn’t put at risk.)
6. Make the fence as visible as possible to both humans and animals. How? By using conductors and posts that can be readily seen both day and night, and against both light and dark backgrounds. That’s why Premier has long advised the use of white/black conductors—to provide contrast and visibility. Fence suppliers worldwide are now following our lead.
7. If possible, do not energize wires less than 12’ above the soil. Why? To allow humans who might contact a wire enough space below it to fall away from any energized wires.
8. Make sure that all energized wires are on the inside of your boundary fence (less likely to be touched, and anyone who touches them without your permission is trespassing). We achieve this with internal energized offset wires.
9. Never connect 2 energizers to the same fence. (It doubles the pulse frequency).
10. The shock from electric fences can panic animals (e.g. horses) and cause them to crash into fences (or people) resulting in injury to one or both. To reduce this risk:
   a. Do not install electrified wires on feedlot fences, corral fences or around riding arenas.
   b. Reduce the available volts and joules on fences that enclose very small areas (e.g. night pens) to lessen the likelihood of animal stress and possible panic.

Warning: In 1991 an accidental fatality occurred when a young child’s head contacted an electrified fence while the child was crawling on wet grass. The fence was correctly installed and functioning properly. The energizer was a UL approved unit. As a result, Premier strongly advises against allowing toddlers access to any electrified fences. Also, due to this incident and others, experts now suggest that human contact by an energized wire to the head and neck may be the most dangerous point of contact. We urge all to especially avoid this kind of contact.