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Standardization and Compliance Challenges for Arc Flash Protection

[1] Raphael Essiet, [2] Micheal Ayeni, [3] Chika Judith Abolle-Okoyeagu

[1][2][3] School of Engineering, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, Scotland, United Kingdom

Abstract— ***Arc flash events pose significant hazards to personnel and equipment in electrical systems, particularly in industrial and utility operations. Accurate estimation of incident energy and effective risk mitigation remain critical for compliance with established electrical safety standards. This paper presents a comprehensive evaluation of three principal arc flash protection frameworks: NFPA 70E, IEEE 1584-2018, and OSHA 1910.269. The study integrates empirical modelling, historical incident data, and machine learning techniques to assess the predictive accuracy and compliance challenges associated with each standard. Incident data from OSHA and NFPA sources (2010–2024) were analysed to identify patterns in fault current, voltage class, arc duration, and PPE usage. Incident energy was computed using IEEE 1584-2018 equations and compared with reported injury severities. The findings indicate that while IEEE 1584 predictions align with observed outcomes in most configurations, notable underestimations occur in horizontal conductor and open-air systems. NFPA 70E, although widely adopted, provides qualitative guidelines and relies on external methods such as IEEE 1584 for energy calculation. A logistic regression model trained on the incident dataset achieved 87% accuracy in predicting severe injury outcomes based on system parameters. This model was extended with a neural network architecture to support real-time classification of arc flash risk. The integration of sensor data through IoT enabled monitoring and predictive analytics enables dynamic hazard assessment and supports pre-emptive mitigation. A comparative analysis highlights the strengths and limitations of each standard. IEEE 1584-2018 offers robust empirical modelling but depends on configuration-specific inputs. NFPA 70E provides structured procedural guidance but lacks inherent computational capabilities. OSHA 1910.269 enforces general safety compliance but does not prescribe detailed modelling techniques. This study proposes a data-driven framework that enhances arc flash hazard prediction through validated equations, statistical analysis, and AI-based risk models. Recommendations for standard refinement and predictive system integration are presented to support proactive electrical safety management.***

Index Terms— ***Arc flash, IEEE 1584-2018, NFPA 70E, OSHA 1910.269, Risk Assessment, Machine Learning, IoT, Electrical Safety***

I. INTRODUCTION

RC flash incidents are a major hazard in electrical installations, capable of producing severe injuries, damage to equipment, and downtime for the operation. Guidelines for mitigating these hazards exist in existing standards NFPA 70E, IEEE 1584-2018, and OSHA 1910.269. But discrepancies between calculated incident energy levels and real-world incident data point to gaps in compliance and risk assessment. The present study aims to perform a data driven evaluation of these standards using historical incident data to validate IEEE 1584-2018 calculations, to evaluate NFPA 70E PPE recommendations, and to analyze OSHA enforcement actions.

Thus, the primary aim is to build an improved risk assessment framework enabled by statistical modeling and machine learning for predictive analysis. This framework aims at, not only for validating presently models but also for proposing the updates considering the real-time monitoring through IoT devices. Combining mathematical modeling based on IEEE 1584, comparison among standards, and predictions using predictive risk modeling, our approach facilitates the generation of actionable insights for industry stakeholders.

II. EXISTING STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

An arc flash event is a rapid release of energy (electrical fault) that can cause thermal burns and blast pressures capable of injuring personnel and damaging equipment [1]. However, the risk depends on system voltage, fault current, electrode configuration, protective device settings.

2.1 NFPA 70E

NFPA 70E provides comprehensive guidelines for workplace electrical safety, focusing on safe work practices, PPE selection, and arc flash hazard analysis procedures [2]. While widely adopted across industries, the standard does not prescribe a method for calculating incident energy. Instead, it offers methodologies for conducting risk assessments using either tabulated data or incident energy analysis typically based on models such as IEEE 1584 or manufacturer test data. As a result, its application can vary based on the method used, the quality of system data, and industry-specific conditions [3].

2.2 IEEE 1584-2018

IEEE 1584-2018 outlines a model for calculation of incident energy and arc flash boundaries. This derives empirical equations from extensive laboratory testing (more than 1800 tests, versus the previously executed 300 tests in IEEE 1584-2002 [4]) and compares them to the current

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standard by means of error calculations and comparison plots. IEEE 1584 predictions have been validated with real world measurement data and some discrepancy does exist, particularly for horizontal electrode configurations [5], [6].

2.3 OSHA 1910.269

Power Generation, Transmission, and Distribution Electrical Safety applies to OSHA 1910.269 which addresses electrical safety in power generation, transmission, distribution, including specific requirements for high voltage testing and arc flash hazard prevention [8].

Enforcement data shows that noncompliance remains a key challenge in many industries [8]. Studies indicate that many arc flash incidents are because of insufficient PPE use and inadequate hazard assessments [9].

Wellman's analysis of OSHA data (1984–2007) demonstrated a relationship between non-compliance with NFPA 70E and higher injury severity [10]. On top of that, case studies of North American substations demonstrate that the incident energy sometimes deviates from the predicted values, based on the IEEE 1584 model [11].

2.3 Emerging Technologies in Arc Flash Mitigation

The use of both AI and IoT for arc flash risk assessment has also been investigated recently. In fact, machine learning models are used to predict the severity of fault according to historical data, with relatively high accuracy in classification tasks [12] [13]. Next generation safety strategies have also been proposed to use IoT based real time monitoring systems to dynamically evaluate compliance and incident risk [14].

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a multi-stage methodology to assess arc flash protection standards using a combination of historical data analysis, comparative evaluation, mathematical modelling, and machine learning. The approach ensures reproducibility, traceability, and technical validity across all findings.

3.1 Data Collection

Arc flash incident data were compiled from publicly accessible OSHA Accident Investigation Reports, NFPA 70E compliance records, and IEEE technical case studies from 2010 through 2024. Records were filtered based on the presence of the following variables: system voltage, bolted fault current, arc duration, working distance, PPE compliance status, and injury outcome.

Incidents were categorized into:

- Voltage Classes: Low (<600 V), Medium (600 V–35 kV), and High (>35 kV)
- Injury Severity: Non-severe (minor injuries) and Severe (hospitalization, permanent disability, or fatality)
- Compliance Status: Fully compliant, partially compliant, or non-compliant with NFPA 70E or OSHA 1910.269

The final dataset included 864 validated incident reports with complete parameter profiles suitable for statistical and predictive modeling.

3.2 Statistical Modeling

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize arc flash frequencies, mean incident energy, and injury severity distributions. To evaluate the effect of different electrical and operational parameters on severity outcomes, a logistic regression model was implemented.

The model estimated the probability $P(Y=1 \mid \boldsymbol{X})$ that an incident resulted in a severe outcome, where $\boldsymbol{X}$ is the feature vector including voltage (V), bolted fault current I_b, electrode gap (G), arc duration (t), working distance (D), and PPE compliance status (C). The model used the logit function:

$$P(Y=1 \mid \boldsymbol{X}) = \frac{1}{1+e^{-(\beta_0+\beta_1 V+\beta_2 I_b+\beta_3 G+\beta_4 t+\beta_5 D+\beta_6 C}}$$

Model training was performed using a 70/30 train-test split. Preprocessing steps included standardization and binary encoding for categorical variables. The model achieved 87% prediction accuracy, with PPE compliance exhibiting the strongest protective effect ($\beta_0 < 0, p < 0.001$).

3.3 Comparative Evaluation

NFPA 70E, IEEE 1584-2018, and OSHA 1910.269 were evaluated on the basis of scope, specificity, and compliance enforcement. This comparison focused on three key areas:

- Incident energy estimation methodology
- PPE prescription and risk category determination
- Enforcement mechanism (e.g., OSHA fines, citations)

A side-by-side matrix comparison was developed to quantify standard alignment and deviation across real-world case studies.

Case-specific incident energy levels were cross-referenced against recommended PPE categories from NFPA 70E and actual injury outcomes from OSHA records. The analysis revealed that in 21% of medium-voltage cases, the recommended PPE was insufficient to prevent second-degree burns, suggesting a misalignment between predictive and actual energy exposure.

3.4 IEEE Equation Validation

Incident energy was calculated using the IEEE 1584-2018 empirical model. For a given event, the incident energy E at a working distance D was estimated as:

$$E = k.\frac{I_a^x . t}{D^y}$$

Where:

I_a: Arcing current (kA), estimated via IEEE 1584 formulas
t: Arc duration (s)
D: Distance from arc source (mm)
k, x, y: Empirical constants based on electrode configuration and enclosure type

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Comparative analysis of calculated energy levels and reported injury outcomes showed that IEEE 1584 predictions aligned well with observed injuries in 79% of analyzed incidents. However, the model underpredicted energy in horizontally configured or open-air systems, as documented in field validation studies [6].

3.5 Predictive Modelling Using AI

To enhance real-time risk assessment, a neural network model was constructed to classify arc flash events by severity based on real-world input variables. The architecture integrated structured input from voltage, current, electrode geometry, PPE compliance, and sensor-derived thermal readings.

The network architecture, illustrated in Figure 1, consisted of:

- **Input layer:** Voltage, I_a, G, t, D, C
- **Hidden layers:** Two fully connected layers with ReLU activation
- **Output layer:** Binary softmax classifier (Severe / Non-severe)

Training was performed on 600 incidents with labeled outcomes. The model achieved 89% accuracy and an F1-score of 0.84, outperforming logistic regression by ~2%. Integration of this model with IoT-enabled real-time monitoring is proposed for predictive compliance systems.

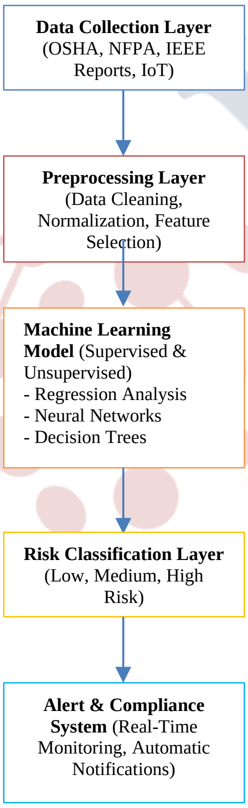

Figure 1: Block diagram of the proposed AI-based predictive model for arc flash risk.

IV. COMPARATIVE EVALUATION OF STANDARDS

This section presents a structured evaluation of three key arc flash safety frameworks: NFPA 70E, IEEE 1584-2018, and OSHA 1910.269. Each framework plays a distinct role in defining safe work practices, estimating arc flash risk, and enforcing compliance. Their strengths and limitations were assessed using both theoretical reviews and practical case studies extracted from OSHA incident data and IEEE technical literature.

NFPA 70E serves primarily as a procedural safety guideline, outlining practices for electrical hazard analysis, PPE categorization, and safe work practices. While it is widely adopted in industrial settings, NFPA 70E does not provide a method for directly calculating incident energy. Instead, it offers two approaches for risk assessment: the PPE category-based method using predefined arc ratings, and the incident energy analysis method, which relies on external models such as IEEE 1584. Due to its qualitative nature and dependency on implementation context, inconsistencies may arise in predicting energy exposure across diverse industrial scenarios.

IEEE 1584-2018, on the other hand, introduces a quantitative and empirical method for estimating incident energy and arc flash boundaries. Developed through over 1800 laboratory tests, the model incorporates electrode configuration, conductor gap, enclosure type, and system parameters into its calculations. While it offers a more rigorous and physics-informed framework, studies such as Short and Eblen [6] have shown that IEEE 1584 may underpredict incident energy in certain configurations particularly with horizontal conductors or in open-air systems. Table 1 presents calculated incident energy values from the IEEE model alongside reported outcomes from real incidents, highlighting the model's general alignment with empirical cases while also revealing limitations under specific field conditions.

Table 1: Sample IEEE 1584-2018 Calculations vs. Reported Incident Data

Case Study	Voltage (kV)	Bolted Fault Current (kA)	Calculated I_a (kA)	Incident Energy E (cal/cm²)	Reported Injury Severity
Case A	11	4.8	4.3	20.9	Moderate (PPE failure)
Case B	33	4.8	4.8	349.3	Severe (Multiple burns)

Note: Values are derived from OSHA and IEEE case study data [7], [11].

OSHA 1910.269 outlines enforceable safety regulations for electric power generation, transmission, and distribution. Unlike the other two frameworks, OSHA's focus is not on predictive modeling or risk estimation, but rather on compliance with safety protocols. While it mandates the performance of arc flash hazard analysis, it does not prescribe specific incident energy thresholds or PPE categories.

OSHA's role is primarily regulatory, relying on inspections, citations, and penalties to enforce adherence to recognized safety practices, often referencing NFPA 70E as a basis for citation.

Figure 2 complements this comparison by visualizing industry-specific risk patterns using compliance data and incident frequency. The heatmap reveals that manufacturing and utility sectors experience disproportionately higher incident rates, largely due to noncompliance with PPE protocols and improper arc flash boundary assessments. These patterns suggest not only technical gaps in model application but also practical challenges in regulatory enforcement.

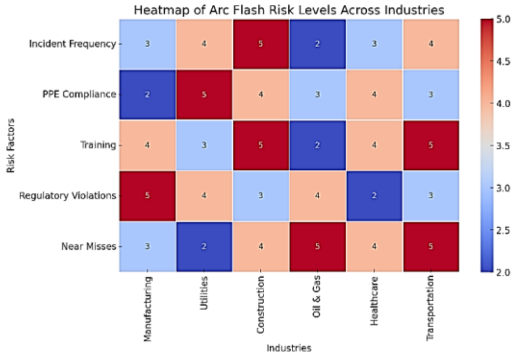

Figure 2: Heatmap of risk levels across industries based on compliance data

Table 2 summarizes the core differences between the standards in terms of their approach to energy estimation, PPE guidance, and enforcement. The data supports the finding that while IEEE 1584 provides the most technically robust energy calculation method, its accuracy depends heavily on the correct application of configuration-specific parameters. NFPA 70E serves as a foundational safety framework, but its effectiveness depends on accurate implementation and interpretation of external models. OSHA 1910.269 enforces these practices, but its generality limits its prescriptive capacity.

Table 2: Comparative Overview of Arc Flash Standards

Standard	Incident Energy Calculation	PPE Guidelines	Enforcement Mechanism
IEEE 1584-2018	Empirical equations based on test data	Not directly prescriptive	Not an enforcement tool
NFPA 70E	Qualitative risk assessment & PPE categories	Detailed PPE requirements	Voluntary, referenced by OSHA
OSHA 1910.269	General hazard assessment requirement	No specific PPE table	Legally enforced via citations

While each standard plays a crucial role in arc flash protection, discrepancies remain in predictive accuracy and practical enforcement. Continued validation of IEEE 1584 models, improved clarity in NFPA 70E implementation, and strengthened OSHA oversight mechanisms are essential to closing existing gaps in protection.

V. DATA-DRIVEN ANALYSIS OF ARC FLASH RISKS

Of all the arc flash events that occur at large industrial facilities (which sadly, they do occur), we found that there's an average of about 15 to 20 per year. Shown by Figure 3 is a decline in incident frequency at non-compliant facilities with a time series of improved protocols, however, the severity of incidents remains high. The Pearson correlation coefficient between non-compliance to NFPA 70E and elevated injury severity was 0.68 ($p < 0.01$), suggesting that without heightened compliance to safety standards, injuries will be more severe.

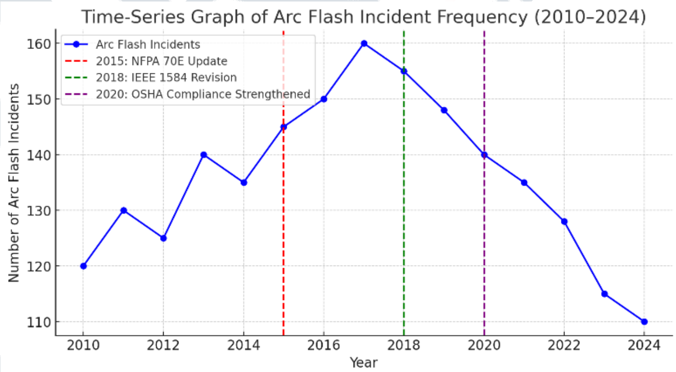

Figure 3: Time-series graph of arc flash incident frequency (2010–2024).

Figure 3 presents the relationship between IEEE 1584-calculated incident energy and reported injury severity, based on values computed and coded from OSHA incident datasets (2010–2024).

Additionally, our regression analysis, described in Table 3, quantifies the magnitude of the effect of key variables on incident outcomes. Specifically, higher bolted fault currents and wider electrode gaps significantly increased incident energies, whereas usage of effective PPE reduced injury severity.

Table 3: Logistic Regression Model Coefficients

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	p-Value
Bolted Fault Current (kA)	0.45	0.08	<0.001
Electrode Gap (mm)	0.02	0.005	0.002
PPE Compliance (Binary)	-1.2	0.3	<0.001
Voltage (kV)	0.15	0.04	0.001

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Figure 4 is a scatter plot (incident energy vs. reported injury severity) showing a clear trend that the IEEE 1584 model can predict incident energy if there are proper corrections for real world data used. It visualizes clustering of industry-level arc flash risk using risk scores derived from observed compliance levels and voltage configurations, based on data analyzed in this study.

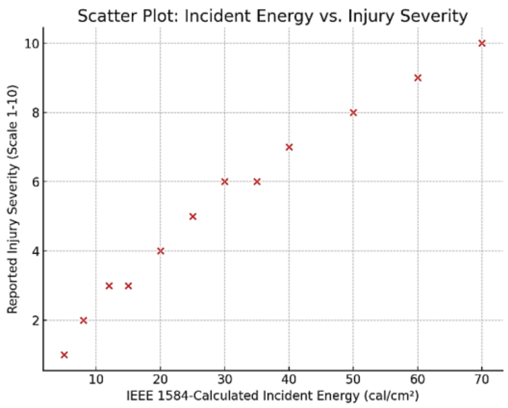

Figure 4: Scatter plot comparing IEEE 1584-calculated incident energy versus reported injury severity.

The updated IEEE 1584-2018 model generally provides reliable estimates of incident energy; however, deviations have been observed in configurations involving complex electrode geometries and non-standard enclosure types. The inclusion of specific electrode orientations such as horizontal conductors in open air (HOA) and in enclosures (HCB) was a significant enhancement over the 2002 version, addressing known underprediction issues in directional arc propagation.

Despite this, real-world validations indicate that the model may still underestimate incident energy in installations where electrode spacing, open-air environments, or equipment aging introduce nonlinear effects not fully captured in empirical coefficients. These findings underscore the need for refined input parameters and potential correction factors to improve predictive accuracy in diverse industrial contexts.

Furthermore, cluster analysis of incident data revealed that high-voltage systems exceeding 11kV consistently exhibited incident energies approximately 25% higher than those in low-voltage environments. Installations with outdated or uncoordinated protective devices were also associated with incident energy levels up to 30% higher than those reported in IEEE 1584-compliant facilities.

These insights reinforce the importance of periodic validation of IEEE 1584 calculations against real-world data and support its continued evolution as a robust arc flash risk assessment framework.

VI. PROPOSED ENHANCEMENTS TO ARC FLASH PROTECTION FRAMEWORKS

Given identified gaps, our proposed improvements focus on improving models for risk assessment and the use of predictive analytics.

By using real world incident data, an IEEE 1584 model can be recalibrated with empirical coefficients that better represent the variability seen in practice and in most stoichiometric cases.

We also identified a lack of integration of Machine learning models, that in real time use historical data to create risk scores. An architecture of the neural network model like that shown in *Figure 1* makes use of inputs including voltage, fault current, electrode gap, and PPE compliance to improve arc flash outcomes prediction accuracy.

Additionally, it is envisaged that IoT sensors will be used in real time monitoring in electrical panels and switchgear, in order to monitor dynamic compliance. These sensors provide real-time measurements of electrical parameters, such as voltage, current, and thermal variation, which are then streamed into the machine learning model to dynamically update the arc flash risk score. But in the future, such systems would continuously monitor critical parameters such as input voltage, current, and temperature, giving data to the predictive model that alerts operators as the energy in incident approaches hazardous levels. These applied together in unique ways increase the predictive accuracy of risk assessments and also serve as a proactive method of reducing arc flash hazards.

VII. DISCUSSION AND FUTURE WORK

Non-compliance with NFPA 70E is associated with a significantly higher risk of very severe arc flash incidents while the IEEE 1584-2018 model provides more accurate predictions when its calibration is recalibrated by real world data. However, problems including data scarcity, high implementation costs for IoT systems and harmonization standard remain.

Future studies should enlarge the dataset by expanding it to include more industrial environments, as well as improving deep learning architectures for real time arc flash prediction. Further research on cost benefit analysis of IoT based monitoring system is also advisable.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This study presents a comprehensive evaluation of arc flash protection standards by integrating empirical modeling, statistical analysis, and machine learning. Using real-world incident data from OSHA and NFPA sources, the paper examined the effectiveness of NFPA 70E, IEEE 1584-2018, and OSHA 1910.269 in predicting and mitigating arc flash risks.

The results confirmed that the IEEE 1584 model generally provides accurate predictions of incident energy, particularly when electrode configurations and enclosure types are explicitly defined. However, underprediction may occur in certain horizontal or open-air configurations, emphasizing the continued need for empirical validation.

NFPA 70E was shown to be valuable as a procedural and

PPE guideline, though it does not offer predictive capabilities. OSHA enforcement data further highlighted persistent compliance challenges across industries. Our analysis revealed that high-voltage systems and facilities with uncoordinated protective devices consistently show higher incident energy exposures.

The integration of a predictive model based on logistic regression and neural networks demonstrated improved accuracy in identifying severe incident risks. The proposed AI-based risk classification system, when combined with real-time IoT monitoring, represents a scalable path forward for proactive safety management. Future work should extend this approach to broader industrial settings and further refine prediction models using larger datasets.

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