

# CHETWYND ECHO

**BC Forest Safety Council CEO preaches economic benefits of safety education**

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**By Max Fawcett**

Safety and the forest industry don't naturally go hand in hand, but Reynold Hert, the CEO of BC Forest Safety Council, is hoping to change that perception. Hert, who was the speaker at the Chetwynd Chamber of Commerce's most recent luncheon, was appointed to his position on March 16 of this year after 31 years in the forest industry, including a stint as president and CEO of Western Forest Products from 2004 to 2008.

"Earlier this decade, the safety record of the industry was very poor," Hert acknowledged. "We were averaging 25 fatalities a year, and the unions, the government, and industry said 'we have to change this, and we have to change the old beliefs.' A task force was put together to make an action plan for the industry, and a safety council was one of the recommendations, and there's been a very large effort by the industry, starting first with the harvesting side, to change the practices and therefore change the culture and the attitude."

Central to those changes was the process of SAFE company certification.

"What safe companies does," Hert said, "is really make sure that the whole industry, or any company within it, has a good understanding of basic safety systems and how you manage to have injury-free operations."

That certification process is a condition of doing business in British Columbia's forests, as British Columbia Timber Sales now requires SAFE Company certification for all parties employing workers on Timber Sales Licenses or bidding on contracts with BCTS.

To date, almost 4,500 companies have registered to become SAFE certified, and almost 2,500 have earned that designation. Meanwhile, approximately 3,500 fallers have also received their certification, and the benefits of this program are already starting to show up. The fatality rate in the period 2006-2008, compared to the seven years before that, has dropped by a third, and is continuing to decline, Hert said.

More importantly, he said, companies are beginning to realize that safety and profitability are complimentary goals. "Many, but not all, companies are beginning to realize that by managing their safety side very well, they're also improving their overall business results because they bring their business into control," Hert said. "Think of it simply: fewer surprises, because you have better planning and better methods and better training and tools."

Hert is excited by the change in attitude that he has already seen in the forest industry towards safety. "That's the really exciting part. As more companies are realizing that, they just embrace the whole thing and they're really realizing that they can have injury-free operations and more profitable operations and more reliable operations. It all goes hand in hand."

Progress aside, there is still work to be done to make British Columbia's forests as safe as they can possible be for the men and women who make a living working in them. "We need to finish getting safe-certified the remaining companies," Hert said, "and we need to go back and improve that system and take it to the next level so we can get even better than that. We started focusing in the industry on the harvesting side, and now we've got to look and find out if it's time to begin going more intently after the manufacturing side."

At the end of the day, Hert is encouraged by the gains that have been achieved by everyone in the industry, from government and business down to the unions and the employees, working together to improve safety. "This is happening because an awful lot of people in the unions and the industry, with the support of WorkSafe, have really been working hard in making a change. When that many people get involved, we are hitting one of the original objectives of changing how people think about the business."

*Length: 625 words*