
Saving lives through safety: 100 years of change

By the BC Forest Safety Council

Before the early 90s, no health and safety association guided the forestry sector in BC. The gap resulted in many preventable injuries and deaths.

Historically, for example, logging accidents took 84 lives in 1929.

A lot has changed since then. And it's changing more swiftly now, since the provincial government mandated the creation of the BC Forest Safety Council (BCFSC) in 2004.

In modern harvesting operations, deaths reached a peak in 2005 when 34 men lost their lives in the woods. In comparison, far fewer have perished in the woods since then; eight people in 2011; 11 in 2012; and 11 in 2013.

The reason for the decline is intention.

"Our commitment is to facilitate continuous improvement in safety and demonstrate that it is not just the right thing to do for workers and their families, but good for business and saving money," said Rob Moonen, the director of SAFE Companies, which is part of the BCFSC.

The BCFSC is a not-for-profit society, charged with helping to reduce serious injuries and fatalities in the sector. The organization works with industry to identify, develop, implement and continually improve initiatives that will secure improved safety performance in forest harvesting operations.

SAFE Company Certification, for example, is a success. Through

education and audits – the SAFE Companies Certification process – industry ensures trucking, falling, silviculture and other forestry companies meet industry standards.

Launched in late 2006, more than 4,600 forestry operations have registered and more than 2,600 companies have achieved SAFE Certification as of March 2014 – including the Sunshine Coast's Full Scope Fallers, 3 Leaf Contracting, Cook and Sons Contracting, Forshner Bros. Trucking, and many others.

SAFE certification is now a prerequisite to bid on BC crown forest contracts.

The BCFSC also administers faller certification in the Province of BC under the BC Faller Training Standard. It champions safe faller training, certification, supervision

and promotion of falling to ensure industry is able to meet increasing demands to replace retiring fallers.

In 2014, 40 to 50 new fallers are scheduled to be trained.

Supporting the development of a confident, competent and well-trained work force, where safety is integrated into every action and process to maximize safe, effective and efficient performance, the BCFSC trained 1,266 workers in 2013, bringing the total to more than 12,000 workers who have received training from the organization since its inception.

In addition, industry drives many safety programs and tactics. The BCFSC provides technical and administrative support to each of these initiatives such as the Trucking Advisory Group, Log Truck Technical

Advisory Committee, Falling Technical Advisory Group, Coast Harvesting Advisory Group, Prequalification Steering and Working Groups, and an Injury Management/Return To Work two-year pilot project.

Last but not least, an independent Forest Safety Ombudsman, appointed by the BCFSC, conducts reviews and produces reports on major forest safety issues, as well as being an impartial third party for individual cases involving safety. Roger Harris has held the position since the organization's inception in 2004.

All of these elements together with a continued commitment by all forestry workers, companies, associations and unions, makes today's BC forest workplaces a much safer place. **F**