

Save money, insurance costs and help get injured workers back to work faster

The forestry industry lags the rest of industry in BC in its handling of injured worker claims with the result that all of our forestry WorkSafeBC insurance premiums go up and the hard and soft dollar costs to individual woodlot owners and other companies sky-rocket.

To help industry become aware of this issue and help shape more positive outcomes, the Truck Loggers Association (TLA), WorkSafeBC and the BC Forest Safety Council have joined together to launch a two-year pilot project to help get Coastal forestry workers back to work faster after an injury, and help reduce industry's WorkSafeBC rates.

Employers are required to report injuries to WorkSafeBC within three business days (this is a requirement of the Workers Compensation Act). In forestry, it takes employers an average of 21 days, while the rest of industry in BC takes seven days, which means forestry workers are having to wait to receive benefits and recovery services, and prepare for their return to work. When it comes to how long an injured worker is off work, forestry is 108 days, while all other industries combined have an average of 60 days.

What this means to our industry is increased costs, with a negative impact on both the company as well as the worker. And for small forestry firms (with one to five employees) which represent 85% of our industry, it can be significant given that one injured worker can mean more than 25% to 50% of production capability and for a critical role worker, stop production entirely, for an indefinite period.

WorkSafeBC cannot begin to process a claim until they are in

receipt of completed Forms 6 (the injured worker form), 7 (the employer form) and Form 8/11 (The Doctor's form). Some of the reasons identified for delays include:

- Remote locations and lack of resources including no internet access to be able to reach WorkSafeBC's website to file a form online, and no hard copies of the Forms readily available
- A lack of awareness by employers that they need to file Form 7s with WorkSafeBC within three days of an injury to a worker (by law)
- An employer delaying sending in a form 7 because they disagree with a claim. The reality is WorkSafeBC reviews both the employee's Form 6 and the employer's Form 7 along with the Doctor's Form 8/11. WorkSafeBC will make the determination of whether or not a claim is legitimate and can be accepted. An employer should never hesitate to file their Form 7, even if they do not agree with the claim. Disagreement can be noted on the form in a place provided (Item No 25.)
- Incomplete wages information provided
- Faxed in hard copy forms that are double-sided, but only a single side is faxed through to WorkSafeBC.

The BCFSC has established a toll-free confidential 1-855-234-8360 phone line for Employers to call to get hard copy forms mailed or couriered to them when they cannot access the internet to file the forms online at www.worksafebc.com/claims/report_injury/incident_and_injury_report/ default.asp, and to answer frequently asked questions that can support employers (or employees) to return their completed forms to WorkSafeBC

as soon as possible and preferably within the 3-day regulation period. The BCFSC can also assist by sending pre-paid envelopes, already addressed to WorkSafeBC to further expedite matters.

As part of the pilot, WorkSafeBC has also created a dedicated Nanaimo-based forestry injury claims team. These dedicated case managers with expertise in coastal forestry trades and knowledge in effective disability management techniques will be able to help injured workers throughout their return-to-work experience. This team will represent a single point of contact for injured workers and their employers. WorkSafeBC believes that the partnership will ensure injured workers get the best of medical care in an expedited way and have everything in place to recover and to get back to work as quickly as possible.

At the end of the two-year pilot period, if this project is successful and helps close the gaps between forestry and other BC industries, and reduces costs for forestry employers, the project will be rolled out Province-wide.

If you would like wallet cards to remind you or your employees of what to do when someone is injured at work, or a poster, please email walletcards@bcforestsafefc.com ♦

This is one of a series of Spotlight on safety columns produced for the Woodland Alliance by the BC Forest Safety Council. If you have a suggestion or would like to see a particular safety topic covered, please let us know. BCFSC has a team of safety advisors with more than 100 years of combined forestry and safety experience to provide trusted guidance and advice in all safety matters. Email safetyadvisors@bcforestsafefc.com or call toll-free: 1-877-741-1060. The BCFSC is here to support industry achieve excellence in health and safety for all forest operations and their workers.