

# MONEY



## Finishing on high note

The Toronto Stock Exchange closes one of its best weeks since November in positive territory.

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# Safety yields bigger returns

**NEW COUNCIL CEO:** Reynold Hert sets out to eliminate forest-industry fatalities

BY PAUL LUKE  
STAFF REPORTER

The turning point for the new head of the B.C. Forest Safety Council came in 1991 when he walked by lumber trimming machinery at a sawmill in Grande Prairie, Alberta.

Reynold Hert, who was then the mill's manager, watched as an operator stuck his hand into running equipment to straighten out a board gone askew. The man, who could have lost fingers, a hand or arm, told Hert that taking this risk was necessary to avoid costly disruptions.

The operator was right about the disruptions. During the next shift, after Hert told him to follow safety rules, the operator shut down his equipment 90 times to straighten out boards.

That cost the mill a whopping two to three hours of production time, cutting throughput by a third for that shift.

Hert put an engineer and maintenance person on the problem and they found a timing flaw in the machinery's design.

They came up with a fix and the mill immediately set production records — without operators having to stick fingers into machinery.

Hert started to realize that safety and productivity go hand in glove. That dawning awareness soon grew into a passionate belief.

"It began to drive home the concept that by firmly supporting safety, we could make the mill safer and more productive," Hert says in an interview from his home in Duncan.

"When we accept safety risks, we're covering up fundamental problems that eat you in some way every day."

Hert will deliver this message to the B.C. industry starting tomorrow when he begins his new job as CEO of the forest safety council.

Hert, 52, has his work cut out as head of the not-for-profit agency charged with promoting forest-industry safety.

The bloodbath in B.C.'s woods and



REYNOLD HERT

mills that led to the council's creation in 2004 has yet to stop.

There were 21 fatalities in the province's woods and production facilities last year, up from 16 the year before, according to the council. That's a big change from 43 deaths in 2005 but it remains unacceptable, Hert says.

Last year saw 6,980 injury claims in harvesting and production, down from 12,750 in 2002.

"The target of the industry is to really lower the number of serious injuries and to take fatalities down to zero," Hert says. "We've got such a long way to go, so let's use all our energy to get there."

If anyone can eliminate fatalities in the industry, it's probably Hert.

He began working in forestry in 1978, rising through the industry to become president-CEO of Western Forest Products, the B.C. coast's largest forest company.

He ran Western, which was born from the ashes of Doman Industries, from 2004 until last fall, when he stepped down to spend more time with his family. During his time at Western, Hert oversaw a dramatic, 85-per-cent reduction in the company's medical incident rate.

One in 45 Western workers needed medical attention in the year he left, down from one in five when he started. Hert's quietly proud of that. But he points out that the world's safest companies such as DuPont have gone even further, reducing



Last year saw 21 fatalities in the province's woods and production facilities, up from 16 the previous year. Health and high productivity are attainable, says the new safety boss. LES BAZSO — PROVINCE FILE PHOTO

their annual medical incident rates to below one person in 200.

Ron Corbeil, regional health and safety co-ordinator with the United Steelworkers union, says Hert will bring a practical, grounded approach to safety as a former industry exec.

"Reynold has always impressed me with his sincerity for health and safety," says Corbeil, who sits on the B.C. safety council's executive committee. "I think he's going to make a difference."

One of the big challenges is contractors desperate to keep working in today's harsh forest products market will cut corners on safety to keep

upfront investment but the return can come quite quickly after that," Hert says.

"Safety really is a business discipline. As you change the way you manage your business, your costs go down, your quality improves and your productivity increases.

"You can actually have it all." Is the council's target of zero fatalities realistic?

Hert, who has scrutinized many injuries and fatalities, insists it is. "When you're staring at the spot where a person died, you realize it was preventable," he says.

"It didn't have to happen."

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