

MONEY



Ivanhoe edges ahead

A plan to develop Ivanhoe Mines' giant Oyu Tolgoi copper-gold project in Mongolia reaches a new plateau.

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MAKE SAVE SPEND

PAUL LUKE (EDITOR) • 604-605-2018 • pluke@theprovince.com | THURSDAY, JULY 9, 2009

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■ A logger works on TimberWest land near the Sooke Potholes in Victoria. A new B.C. safety report says some of the deaths and injuries among B.C.'s tree fallers are due to a rejection of safety precautions. But the report also cites a lack of proper planning and supervision.

— VICTORIA TIMES COLONIST

More people can afford to buy B.C. houses

SALES START PICKING UP: Vancouver costs drop but stay well ahead of the rest of the country

Housing affordability in B.C. over the past year has improved the most since 1991, RBC Economics says.

The percentage of income required for various housing types in the province fell by 3.4 to 7.4 percentage points during the first quarter of the year, RBC said in a report released yesterday.

The average cost of maintaining a detached bungalow in Vancouver was 62.6 per cent of household income during the first quarter, while in Toronto it was 45.9 per cent, RBC said. Calgary affordability was 35.1 per cent.

"The repair of poor affordability levels in British Columbia accelerated significantly in the first quarter of this year," RBC said.

"Sales of existing homes have picked up vigorously from historical lows during the November-January period and prices have shown hints of levelling off."

A slower pace of existing homes going up for sale in B.C. and with low construction levels for new ones will likely put a floor under prices in coming months, RBC said.

Across the country, weaker home prices and lower borrowing costs are attracting buyers back into the housing market, RBC said.

"Declining costs of home ownership during the last year were driven by significant cuts in mortgage rates along with the federal government taking an active role in supporting the mortgage securities market," RBC said.

RBC's affordability index — the percentage of pre-tax monthly household income needed to maintain a home, including mortgage payments, utilities and property taxes — improved across all housing segments in Canada.

— Canwest News Service
with files from Staff Reporter

Fallers taking deadly risks

REPORT: Tighter supervision needed to boost safety measures

BY JOHN BERMINGHAM
STAFF REPORTER

One of the world's most dangerous jobs is not getting any safer.

A review of deaths and injuries among B.C. tree fallers has found that in most cases they weren't taking the proper safety precautions. In a review of 32 deaths and serious injuries between 2000 and last year, the WorkSafe B.C. report found that in 28 cases proper planning wasn't being done.

Fallers weren't getting enough site-specific information on terrain, hazards and wind patterns, it said. In 19 cases, the supervisor didn't do a hazard assessment, and in 16 cases the supervisor was also a working faller.

Tom Bailey, forestry manager for WorkSafe B.C., said the review was done because seven of the eight fallers who died last year were provincially certified. "The people

who are being killed are not the young kids," he said yesterday.

"It's the seasoned veterans."

Bailey blamed poor planning, supervision and work procedures for most of the incidents.

While numbers working in the forest sector are shrinking, the death rate has spiked in the past year. Last year's eight fatalities came after no certified fallers died at work in 2006 and 2007.

So far this year, two fallers have died on the job.

Fallers account for 14 per cent of B.C.'s forestry workers, but 25 per cent of all serious-injury claims.

Bailey sees a need for better site-risk assessment, and for a safety audit of falling industry operations. "There's going to be a quality-control system put in place," he said. "It will test fallers to see if they know how to do the job and if they're actually doing it."

As well, a first-line supervisor in the bush will be required.

B.C. Forest Safety Council CEO Reynold Hert said he has looked at the issue and has come to many of the same conclusions. Despite better faller training, and two years without a death, it's hard to change the habits of 3,500 certified fallers, Hert said.

"What you finally need is support in the field, where planning and supervision is supporting the right habits," Hert said. The council is beginning to train supervisors to do that, he said.

In January, former B.C. auditor-general John Doyle called for better danger-recognition for fallers, and recommended supervision on every worksite.

Ron Corbeil, health-and-safety co-ordinator for the United Steelworkers, said a lot of fallers are one-person operations and don't always have proper supervision.

Safety should be made a key part of the B.C. Forest and Range Practices Act, he said.

"If you are to look after the environment and the streams and the wildlife, surely you need to protect worker safety," said Corbeil.

Mike McKibbin, who founded the Western Fallers Association to represent independent fallers, said the group's 100-page report in 2005 listed 41 separate dangers for fallers.

"The report was ignored," McKibbin said. "There was a great big hubbub, but for the most part, the same problems are still out there."

The small contractor is often pressured to take short cuts, he said. "The more you do, the more money you make," McKibbin said. "You get paid more to cut corners."

"The only thing we have going for us now is that nobody is working." jbermingham@theprovince.com

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