



Paying tribute to forest workers killed on the job

By Tanner Elton

On April 28th, BC workers and employers pause at Day of Mourning ceremonies throughout the province to remember and honour those who have lost their lives, been injured or made ill on the job. The BC Forest Safety Council and its 15 member organizations, representing companies, contractors, independent workers, labour and government, support this national day of reflection and recommit to ensuring all workers return from work safely everyday to their friends and families.

In our industry last year, 16 BC forestry workers died on the job, four more than the year before. To date in 2008, five have lost their lives. While we are making progress in many areas and the number of fatalities in recent years has decreased, even one life lost at work is unacceptable.

Despite the forest sector's inherent dangers, we do not accept that any of our workers should die or suffer life-altering injuries on the job. Safety must be an over-riding priority, which means nothing comes ahead of safety — not production, not profit, not environmental protection. Worker and worksite safety comes first.

For the last three years, the forestry industry has responded at every level to improve safety performance. In 2007 we started to see the results of these efforts. Across our province, forestry operations put effective safety programs in place, thousands of workers completed safety-focused training and the industry's approaches and attitude toward safety started to change.

The fact these changes are occurring at a time when the industry is facing other difficult issues is a clear indication of a new commitment to safety.

While the forest industry has made a good start and we expect continued improvement, there is a long way to go. We have laid the framework to make our forests a safer place but we need to continue to build on this. On this day, we must reflect not only on our loss but also learn from these tragedies and reflect on the true cost of unsafe practices for workers, their families, their employers and their communities.

'Unsafe is Unacceptable.'

Tanner Elton is the CEO of the BC Forest Safety Council.