

Forest Safety news

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Far-ranging safety improvements

B.C. forestry's commitment to better safety is starting to pay off significantly, according to the Council's analysis of recently-released WorkSafeBC statistics for 2006.

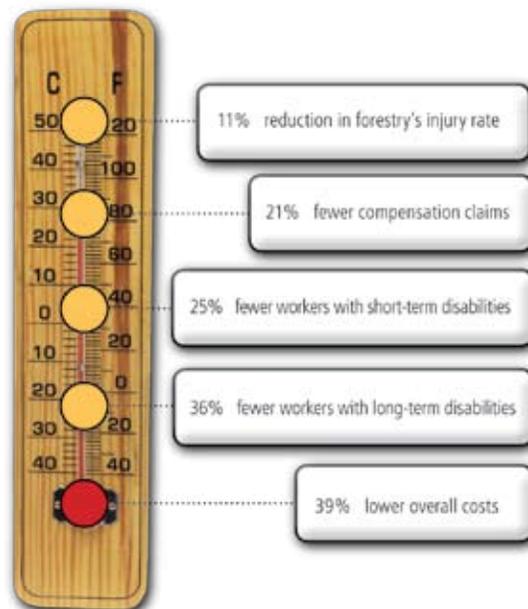
The comparison with 2005 timber harvesting experience found unprecedented, far-ranging improvements in sector indicators for injuries, compensation and cost indicators (table at right).

"This year-to-year record reflects

the extraordinary focus on safety that began in late 2005 and continues today. It is a collaborative effort of industry, WorkSafeBC and government," declared Council Co-Chair Ron Gorman.

"We still have a long way to go, but it's clear we're making a difference. The last two years have seen a crucial shift in attitudes, with the industry saying, 'This is our problem;

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SAFE Companies thriving at first anniversary

Nearing the first anniversary of its November 2006 launch, the Council's SAFE Companies program continues to thrive.

By late September, 161 forestry operations had

earned SAFE certification after passing audits of their safety programs. As well, 2,325 had registered to become certified: 852 independent companies, 1,214 small companies and

259 large ones. "Congratulations are definitely in order for the effort, time and investment of individual companies, particularly in this difficult and trying time for the industry," said

SAFE Companies Program Director Krista Bax.

"Their commitments are producing initial benefits – increased awareness, improved communications among workers and contractors, fewer injuries,

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When economics hurt



As we ask companies and individuals to invest in safety, we need to appreciate the difficult times

confronting our industry. When the economics aren't working, it's hard to focus on anything else.

This came into stark focus for me when a company owner I know reasonably

well asked about a six-month extension of his SAFE Companies audit deadline. He explained matter-of-factly that he would know by then whether he would still be operating.

A strong supporter and practitioner of safety, this man is dedicated to his industry, his workers and his region. But he won't need a safety audit if he goes out of business.

I'm confident he'll make it – that his company will be certified and be better for it and that he'll play as big a role in forestry's future as he has in its past.

For Council staff, starting with the CEO, this means that we will endeavour to:

- Be mindful of current economic pressures. This doesn't mean slowing our programs, but working with our members as they meet the challenges.

- Remember that Council funding comes from industry. We must continue to be wise stewards of the resources entrusted to us.

Safe working forests are vital, but they depend on a financially sound industry. We need both.

TANNER ELTON, CEO

Far-reaching changes

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it's not acceptable, and we're going to fix it.' Forestry workers, work sites and companies are safer; and they will become even safer as time goes on," he noted.

As tangible evidence of forestry taking responsibility for its safety performance and turning it around, Gorman pointed to industry's strong support of key Council initiatives – the flagship SAFE Companies program, faller certification and forestry supervisor training.

"You know something good is happening," he said, "when the number of injured workers goes from 1,193 to 936 in one year, and compensation costs drop from \$45.5 million to \$27.8 million."

One area of concern is log hauling, where safety improvements will require "more than a focus on companies and drivers. We'll also need to consider road issues

and the hauling environment," according to Keith Playfair. He is former Council co-chair, principal of the KDL Group and a one-time logging truck driver.

"Today's roads are busy, given expanded logging activity around the mountain pine beetle infestation and the growing back-country presence of the mining and petroleum exploration industries, said Playfair.

"The objective in log hauling is to focus on roads, loads and drivers and ultimately eliminate injuries and fatalities as we're working to do in other areas."

Agreeing with that, Gorman said it "fits the industry's overall goal of creating a fundamental safety culture. We've made a good beginning and must keep up the momentum throughout the sector."



OTTO SCHULTE OF INTERFOR REFLECTS ON SAFETY

Safety turning point

New statistics show dramatic safety improvements in B.C. forestry (story at left). One of many employers behind that is Interfor, which reduced medical injuries more than 80 per cent since 1998. Company Vice President Otto Schulte describes a turning point in the process.

Our world came crashing down in October 2002 with two fatalities in 12 days. I had already experienced the aftermath of too many serious injuries and fatalities and, like everyone else, wanted to know what went so terribly wrong.

Eventually, we concluded that our safety program didn't have a handle on widespread, dangerous attitudes that led to habitual acceptance of workplace death and injury. The company began creating a culture of safety.

The first of seven fundamental corporate safety values and beliefs now proclaims safety "as the company's overriding priority." "Our code of conduct makes safety an "uncompromised right and responsibility." Interfor considers these more than noble sentiments, but

operational imperatives for all workers and contractors.

Because it involves both individuals and groups, fostering cultural change is a chicken-and-egg situation, and the incubator for us has been the Forest Safety Council.

Its SAFE Companies program was and is a huge influence on Interfor, helping focus attention on safety for every employee and contractor.

Our experience is part of a larger process, as SAFE Companies raises the bar to higher but realistic safety levels for forestry throughout the province.

With this program and others, B.C. forestry has started long overdue operational and cultural improvements. The entire sector must maintain the initial momentum and finish this vital work.

Appointments

The groups overseeing two of the Council's major operational areas have been made committees of the Board of Directors with new chairs.

Former Co-Chair Keith Playfair heads the SAFE Companies Committee, and Board member Dave

Lewis of the Truck Loggers Association chairs the Training Committee.

Another appointment saw Reid Hedlund, chair of the Interior Logging Association, named to the Council's Executive Committee. He also represents ILA as a director on the Board.

'A false economy that can cost big time'

Learning the hard way in forestry can be painful and expensive, and "trying to save on training is a false economy that can cost big time," according to Steve Mueller, the Council's director of work force development.

"Some employers do nothing and simply hope they'll get by," he said, "but that's risky business."

"On-the-job injuries and deaths are personal catastrophes for workers and families and can cost a company hundreds of thousands of dollars. That's many times the expense of training to deliver proven skills and knowledge that can help keep workers safe."

The linchpin for safety is properly trained supervisors, he emphasized.

"They can identify and control hazards and manage employees to work safely. This is why WorkSafeBC requires all supervisors to receive training specific to their jobs," Mueller said.

Introduced earlier this year, the Council's training for forestry supervisors is the most comprehensive in the province, according to Mueller. It meets the regulatory requirement and, though not mandatory for SAFE Companies certification, can help employers achieve it.

He is impressed that so many forestry employers are making the link between effective, standardized training and better safety.

"In the coming years, I expect we'll look at injury statistics and see major differences between companies that were early adopters of training and those that weren't," he said. "The fact is that training is cost-efficient for both individual companies and forestry industry as a whole."

He cites the oil-and-gas exploration sector, which invested heavily in training, saw injury rates and costs



SUPERVISOR TRAINING LED BY COUNCIL SENIOR WORKER DEVELOPMENT ADVISOR BILL BOLTON

drop dramatically and successfully shed its reputation as "the killing fields."

"That industry has reduced the human toll of poor safety practices, and avoided costs from lost production and equipment damage associated with injuries and near-misses. There's no reason timber harvesting can't do the same," said Mueller.

Learning to drive is Mueller's example. "A family member can give you some behind-the-wheel pointers, but you may also pick up bad habits." The best preparation for the exam, and the reality of the road, is qualified instruction.

"Every day in the working woods is another exam, and failure there can be an awful learning experience."

Benefits follow certification

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higher morale, greater productivity and lower costs."

Those benefits are clear for Stones Bay Holdings Ltd. of Fort St. James. Employing about 30 workers, the stump-to-dump

contractor was certified in March.

"Our safety experience is definitely a lot better," said Controller Darren McQueen. "We have yet to have an incident of any substance this season and no near-

misses. He also expected equipment damage to be much less than last year.

"The biggest win for us was the employee buy-in," he said, "a whole attitude change for our crew." McQueen acknowledges

that certification requires effort, "but you want your employees to work safe and go home safe. That's what it's all about."

His advice to others: "You'll be fine if your program meets all the SAFE Companies criteria — and you follow them. Just do what your own program says."



Check what 'new employees' means

Forestry employers should be aware that regulations for orienting young workers now can apply to older ones, too.

Taking effect in mid-summer, WorkSafeBC regulatory amendments extended mandatory orientation and job-specific training for young workers to include:

- All new employees regardless of age.
- Current employees not changing companies, but returning to

work after absences, changing job duties or encountering new situations in existing workplaces.

The safety agency's rationale is that all new workers, no matter how old, face a higher risk of injury when starting new jobs.

Another change requires employers to document their orientations of young and new workers.

Otherwise, the WorkSafeBC amendments

essentially puts in one place previously-existing requirements that had been located in different sections of the regulations.

Go to www2.worksafebc.com/Topics/YoungWorker/Home.asp? for details on new Sections 3.22 through 3.25 – including detailed guidelines and a sample orientation checklist that forestry employers can adapt to their own operations.

Update on serious injuries and fatalities

What follows summarizes information on serious injuries and fatalities in B.C. forestry prepared for the September meeting of the Council's Board of Directors.

This year through mid-August, the sector recorded 11 fatalities and 23 serious injuries, up from eight serious injuries and eight fatalities for the same time

frame in 2006. (Based on preliminary WorkSafeBC Notice of Incident reports, these figures are subject to change.)

Noteworthy points and trends for the period include:

- Two fatalities in marine occupations included here were related to forestry.
- Four serious injuries involving logging truck drivers meant log hauling led the sector in serious injuries for the period covered by the report.
- Other fatalities and serious injuries involved skidders rolling over.

Forest Safety News

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Spotlight on Safety: Lockout in the woods

"The only forest workers who need to think about 'lockout' are in sawmills, right? Wrong. In the great outdoors of timber harvesting, it's no less a matter of life and death."

That paragraph starts a two-part presentation in this fall's *Interior Trucker & Logger* prepared by Michael Paine, a WorkSafeBC representative on

the Council's board of directors.

He explains how loggers and others can stay safer by immobilizing equipment and objects on forestry work sites.

Find the Interior Logging Association magazine at www.interiorlogging.org/magazine.php.