

# Not Out of the Woods

Ensuring Safety in BC's Forest Sector  
through Recruitment, Training and Certification

January 15, 2007



Roger Harris  
BC Forest Safety Ombudsman



**BC Forest Safety Council**  
*Unsafe is Unacceptable*

# **PREFACE**

## **About the Forest Safety Ombudsman**

As a result of the Council's review of current safety practices and concerns, it became clear that there was a need for industry to provide the means for safety issues to be raised and discussed in as free and open a manner as possible.

The Office of the Forest Safety Ombudsman was established to create a safe, confidential and persuasive agent for the raising and review of safety concerns throughout the sector and facilitating impartial and timely resolution of safety issues.

The Forest Safety Ombudsman is part of the BC Forest Safety Council and has a mandate to investigate safety issues and recommend the best means to address them. The Ombudsman will use review, recommendation, mediation and conciliation where necessary. The Ombudsman will adhere to the following principles of operation: impartiality, fair and timely process, confidentiality and, coordination of action given the number of other organizations involved in safety in British Columbia. In particular the Ombudsman will work closely with the WorkSafeBC given its mandate to enhance safety in British Columbia.

## **The BC Forest Safety Council**

The BC Forest Safety Council was created by the forest industry to eliminate fatalities and serious injuries by: promoting cultural change to ensure that safety is treated as an over-riding priority, promoting a safety conscious legal regime, developing a competent and confident workforce and, encourage SAFE companies to have functioning safety programs and safe conduct is encouraged and rewarded.

All the organizations and associations that represent the forest sector are members of the Council: the regional logging associations, associations representing major licencees and small tenure holders, organized labour, the silviculture sector, independent fallers, and key government agencies.

The Council is funded through industry contributions through WCB assessments, contributions from diverse sources for specific programs and fees for services.

-----

For more information on the Council and the Forest Ombudsman is available on the Council's website: <http://www.bcforestsafe.org>.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

My first few months as the Forest Ombudsman were spent visiting every region of the province and speaking with as many forest workers, contractors, companies and organizations as I could. My intention was to make the existence of the office better known and understood and to start to address specific issues and concerns within our industry.

As I started to receive the views and concerns, it became clear that in addition to specific issues between individuals and companies, there were a significant number of more general issues that would be raised that required a broader, industry-wide response.

As a result, I determined to conduct a limited number of reviews that would allow me to address those more general issues and concerns that are felt to directly impact of the safety performance of our industry.

This first review deals with the concerns raised related to certification, training and recruitment within our industry.

The title of this review, ***Not Out of the Woods***, reflects two concerns:

First, recruiting qualified and skilled people to work in the forest industry, and retaining them, is a challenge the forest industry must address, likely for the first time in British Columbia's history. We are facing an environment when jobs outside of the woods are equally or more attractive than jobs in the forest industry. If the industry is to thrive and continue to provide British Columbians with revenue to fuel the provincial economy as it has done in the past, we need to find effective and economic methods to provide the workforce that can do that. We need to create an environment that attracts people, not drives them out of the woods.

Second, there are no simple and straightforward answers to providing effective training and certification to ensure workers in the forest industry are safe. Though we are not out of the woods in tackling this issue, it is one that we will not and cannot let slide. It is critical to the forest industry's future.

The first part of this review focuses on the significant changes to how our industry attracts and trains our workforce and the very real challenges that we are facing, for the first time, to recruit and retain workers.

I then focus on specific training programs, beginning with the recently implemented Faller Certification Program and then moving to those areas where we have not yet adopted certified training.

Finally, I deal with the impact that stress is having on our industry and its implications for safety.

At the risk of discouraging any reader to consider the full report, here are the highlights:

- We are facing a serious crisis in the recruitment, training and retention of workers.
  - Traditional paths for recruitment and training are no longer in place.
  - We do not have the same mentoring and informal training process that existed in the past.
  - We are facing competition for workers from other resource sectors.
  - We need to understand that generally we will retain workers for shorter periods of time, requiring more on-going recruitment and training.
  - With smaller companies and shorter seasons in many regions, we need to be doing more as an industry that was, in the past, looked after by companies.
- If we do not address these issues of recruitment, training and retention in the immediate future, it will have serious implications for the sector and our safety performance. In the words of one manager, “This is a train wreck waiting to happen.”
- Given these challenges, we need to make working in our industry more attractive than it currently is. We must recognize that our current needs are for a skilled workforce capable of working safely in the highly efficient and mechanized industry that we have become. In this regard, we must address issues related to the continuity of work, lifestyle, and wage rates.
- We must also meet our current training challenges. These include developing industry wide standards for entry level training that address:
  - The cost of training and the need for training and educational support for individuals and companies.
  - Retention strategies to keep our workers in the sector.
  - Liability issues related to on-site and in-house training.
  - The loss of a pool of less skilled, entry level positions to draw on.
- We need to have more advanced training and retraining in the sector. We need advanced training on the sophisticated and complex equipment that now dominates the harvesting sector, and more retaining of workers already engaged in the sector or related sector. In this regard, the provincial government advanced education and retraining agencies need to be offering more assistance. The Auditor General's review needs to consider the current level of support now being offered.
- Current training programs need to be accelerated and their scope expanded.
  - Currently, the Faller Training Standard applies to forestry operations. It should apply to any occupation where individuals use chainsaws to cut down trees. The dangers and the need for proper procedures don't

disappear when the tree is in a park or a municipality or part of a fire fighting operation. The program needs to take this into consideration.

- The cost of training of new fallers is an issue, and there needs to be more support for access to retraining of existing workers and new workers.
- Logging Truck Driver Training is the next area the Council should focus on. A sector-wide certification program, coordinated with ICBC and the broader trucking sector, needs to be undertaken.
- There needs to be a greater focus on training for non-certified occupations within the sector. This includes:
  - The BC Forest Safety Council should take the lead, working with industry, to identify and develop industry definitions of the non-certified trade job classifications and functions within the forest harvest sector.
  - The provincial government, through the Ministry of Advanced Education, should incorporate all of the non-certified training programs into advanced education curriculums and resource them in the same manner it supports other industry trades training.
  - BC Forest Safety Council, working with industry, should develop the front-end training curriculum that would be delivered through an accredited, post secondary educational institution or private/industry training facility.
  - The impact of stress on the safety performance of the industry needs to be addressed. I acknowledge that it is difficult to get at this issue, but that does not make any less real. As a starting point, The BC Forest Safety Council should take the lead, working with forest industry stakeholders, to hold a stakeholder meeting to deal specifically with stress in the workplace.

I hope this review and its recommendations provide a framework for discussion for solutions to recruitment, training, retention and certification that will ensure safety in the BC forest industry.

Training, recruitment, retention, certification and safety are all complex issues and a coordinated response is needed by all agencies, companies, contractors and individuals involved in the industry.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE .....	I
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	II
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	2
INTRODUCTION .....	1
TRADITIONAL ROUTES TO ENTRY AND TRAINING .....	3
Recruitment .....	3
Entry Level and Advanced Training .....	3
RECRUITMENT CHALLENGES TODAY .....	5
RETENTION CHALLENGES TODAY .....	6
Continuity of work .....	6
Lifestyle .....	6
Wage Rates .....	7
TRAINING CHALLENGES TODAY .....	8
Entry-Level Training .....	8
Advanced Training .....	9
Re-Training .....	10
CURRENT TRAINING PROGRAMS .....	13
New Faller Training Program (Faller Program) .....	13
Log Truck Driver Training .....	16
Recommendations .....	17
NON-CERTIFIED TRADES TRAINING .....	19
Recommendations .....	21
STRESS AND SAFETY .....	23
APPENDIX A -- RECOMMENDATIONS .....	25
Re-Training .....	25
Faller Training .....	25
Log Truck Driver Training .....	26
Non-Certified Trades Training .....	26
Stress and Safety .....	26
APPENDIX B -- ROSTER OF INTERVIEWS .....	27
August 2006: .....	27
October 2006: .....	27
November 2006: .....	27
December 2006: .....	27
APPENDIX C -- INITIATIVES CURRENTLY IN PROGRESS IN THE FOREST INDUSTRY .....	28

## INTRODUCTION

Effective recruitment, training and certification are fundamental to improving the safety performance of the forest industry. Therefore, when the BC Forest Safety Council set up the Office of the Ombudsman in 2006, the first formal action of the BC Forest Safety Ombudsman was to undertake a review of training and certification within the forest industry.

The core component of any safe work environment is a well-trained and educated workforce. How candidates are selected for training, how training programs are delivered, how competency is measured and how certification is maintained are all important components of a professional workforce. It is also critical that training and certification stay current with the changes in technology and environment of the forest workplace.

When I began my review of training and certification, the intent of the review was to engage employees, owner operators, contractors, licencees, WorkSafeBC (WSBC), Ministry of Forests and Range (MOFR) and federal and provincial funding agencies to determine the roles and responsibilities of each in the training and certification of the forest workforce. However, it quickly came to light that the issues relating to recruitment, training and certification go much deeper than determining who has a role in training and who has responsibility for certification. What became evident is that training is almost non-existent, finding appropriate people to train so that they can enter the forest sector is difficult, and certification is only in place in a limited number of skill areas. A review of training and certification would be ineffective in addressing the problems of safety performance in the forest industry. What was needed was more broad-reaching discussion of changes in the forest industry that have led to this state of affairs, identification of problem areas and suggestions that could lead to solutions.

This report is the beginning of that discussion. It is the result of interviews and consultation undertaken by the Forest Safety Ombudsman between August and December, 2006. The interviews involved all of the member organizations of the BC Forest Safety Council.

Interviews were conducted around the province with representatives from each sector including the United Steelworkers, as well as with a number of independent ad hoc groups representing workers, training institutions and contractors associated with or in the forest sector. Interviews were also conducted with a number of regulatory agencies including WSBC, MOFR, Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (ICBC), Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance and Human Resources Social Development Canada.

The title of this report, “**Not Out of the Woods,**” reflects two concerns. First, recruiting qualified and skilled people to work in the forest industry, and retaining them, is a challenge the forest industry must address, likely for the first time in British Columbia’s history. We are facing an environment when jobs outside of the woods are equally or more attractive than jobs in the forest industry. If the

industry is to thrive and continue to provide British Columbians with revenue to fuel the provincial economy as it has done in the past, we need to find effective and economic methods to provide the workforce that can do that. We need to create an environment that attracts people, not drives them out of the woods. Second, there are no simple and straightforward answers to providing effective training and certification to ensure workers in the forest industry are safe. Though we are not out of the woods in tackling this issue, it is one that we will not and cannot let slide. It is critical to the forest industry's future.

I would like at the outset to thank all of the individuals and groups who took the time to share their thoughts about what I regard as one of the finest and proudest professions in the province of BC. I am grateful for their candid comments, considered opinions, their experience and their concern about the future of the forest industry.

## TRADITIONAL ROUTES TO ENTRY AND TRAINING

*“It used to be that if your father was a logger, you’d likely be a logger, too. It was great work, exciting work, with good pay, and a solid tradition that went from generation to generation. But those days are gone.”*

### Recruitment

Traditionally, the forest industry offered a large number of unskilled entry level positions (choker man, swamper, pad man, drillers’ helper, etc.)—jobs that required little or no experience. This created a pool of people in positions associated with the different phases of logging in the forest/harvest sector who could be assessed by companies for their training potential and possible promotion to more skilled positions. Over time, individuals from the unskilled labour pool that the entry-level jobs created were selected for training. In many cases union contracts influenced or identified criteria by which candidates were selected.

### Entry Level and Advanced Training

Traditionally, most training programs were developed and delivered in-house and the cost for those programs was considered a normal part of doing business. Because most of the harvest on the coast was managed by large corporate entities with company crews, the capacity, expertise and development of formalized, detailed training programs existed within those corporate umbrellas.

Contractors, like licencees, undertook the role and responsibility to train individuals. Workforce planning was an informal and loose process where individuals identified for promotion were chosen from within the company workforce and the training was designed and delivered in-house. The cost of delivering training programs was part of the rate structure.

For the most part, forest-sector training was done on a company-to-company basis with little consistency across the industry. While some companies developed excellent training programs, others were less sophisticated. There was no consistent, standardized approach to training and no formally accepted industry standards to measure competency. In many cases, individual competency was acquired as employees moved from one employer to another.

By the end of the 1990s, many of the workforce reductions that occurred in the harvest sector were in the job entry, less skilled ground positions, positions that had been the source of potential trainees. The loss of this workforce eliminated a valuable assessment tool for employers to select people for training.

Over the same period, corporate company operations were also experiencing a reduction as more of the harvest was being shifted to full-phase timber harvesting contractors. This shift at the operational level resulted in a loss of the in-house expertise that had been used to develop and deliver training programs.

The introduction of new harvest methods, techniques and technology in the 1990s resulted in increased harvest productivity. The effect of these productivity improvements was a significant reduction in the workforce in the harvest sector. The IWA membership in British Columbia dropped from more than 30,000 members in 1990 to approximately 13,000 by the end of the decade. With few other options outside of the forest industry for these workers to pursue, a pool of skilled workers was readily available. The need to train, especially at advanced levels, became less important and firms had the luxury of hiring fully qualified individuals rather than training workers.

## RECRUITMENT CHALLENGES TODAY

As I conducted my interviews across the province, in nearly every case before people turned their thoughts to the topic of training, the topic of recruitment and retention came up. Nearly every person interviewed spoke about the difficulty of attracting new people into the forest industry.

***A contractor in the Central Interior and a grapple-yard operator on Vancouver Island both said that media coverage concerning the accident and fatality rate in the forest sector over the last year made a career in the army appear safer than working in the forest sector in BC.***

With this kind of advertising, they told me, it was no wonder young people were not looking at the forest sector as a career choice.

The forest sector, like many resource sectors, has a tradition of family members flowing into the industry. Now, however, higher levels of stress, lower job satisfaction and general insecurity have all contributed to creating a negative image of logging as a career choice. During many of my interviews, I heard comments from older workers stating they would not recommend logging to their children as a career choice.

Over the last couple of decades, operational changes in the forest sector began to affect the demographics of people working in the industry. Driven by both environmental and economic pressures, the forest industry saw a significant increase in downtime over the course of the normal operating work year. The forest sector moved from an industry that was seasonal to one perceived as only part-time, which has made recruitment into this industry even more difficult.

The introduction of new harvesting methods and advances in technology eliminated a number of the lower-skilled job entry positions. These jobs were the gateway to gain employment into the industry for individuals who lacked any previous experience. Today, even if an individual were inclined to look to the forest sector for a career, there is no clear educational path to get the necessary skill and experience to enter that workforce.

***One falling contractor told me, "The greatest challenge facing the forest sector over the next decade will be to attract new people. This is a train wreck waiting to happen."***

For many contractors, the inability to attract new people and the challenges of retaining existing crews are the most serious issues facing the forest industry today.

## **RETENTION CHALLENGES TODAY**

With more job and career options available today, people with skills have exited the industry, competitive economic pressure has reduced in-house training and the inability to provide continual employment makes it difficult to retain skilled workers and attract new personnel.

Currently there are contractors who are turning down work and equipment that is sitting idle due to the inability to find trained personnel. Contractors are unable to harvest timber and will fail to meet their contractual harvest requirements because of crew shortages. The industry is on the verge of having mill yards experience a drop in their log inventories. The potential damage to the industry and provincial economy is very real.

*In one company operation, I was told, retirees were being recruited to come back into the workforce and in many other operations supervisory staff, on a regular basis, now perform the work normally undertaken by hourly crews.*

In addition to more options being available for skilled workers now, a number of other factors were identified as reasons people chose not to continue working in the forest sector: continuity of work, lifestyle and wage rates.

### **Continuity of work**

This was the area where the greatest number of comments and observations were made. Over the last decade the industry right across the province has experienced a boom and bust environment within the logging/harvest year. Operations are either working flat out or sitting at home for protracted periods of time. The requirement to ramp up or down has had a destabilizing effect on contractors and the workforce. The inability to secure long-term contracts or access long-term timber supplies was identified as one of the major reasons for this destabilizing effect. Although this style of operation has arisen to meet market demands, it has seriously impacted the ability to recruit and retain people in the industry.

### **Lifestyle**

The long hours, variable work schedules and remote camp living all contribute to individuals making quality of life decisions that do not work for the forest sector. Other employment options available today, especially for skilled workers, allow individuals to find comparable work in an 8-to-4 environment. The long hours and away-from-home culture of the forest industry is not what many people today are looking for in a career.

## Wage Rates

Historically, the wage rates in the forest sector were high in relation to other industrial occupations. It was this premium paid that offset the disincentives of camp living and long hours. Today, rates of pay in both the private and public sector are comparable to forest sector rates. The ability to attain a comparable standard of living (or better) and be home most evenings and weekends is drawing people away from the forest sector. The premiums now paid in the oil and gas sector have resulted in those individuals for whom camp life and long hours suits their lifestyle to move across to that industry.

***Recruitment and retention of our workforce is a safety issue. Establishing a safe and professional workforce will only happen if the issues of dependable work continuity, lifestyle and job satisfaction are addressed.***

Without a stable, well-trained workforce, the demands put on the remaining labour force will only increase. The pressure to work longer hours over extended periods of time to meet contractual obligations will impact the workplace in a manner that is not conducive to creating a safe working environment. While the shortage of skilled professionals currently is located in pockets around the province, this has the potential to emerge across the province simultaneously. The prediction of mills being impacted over the next few years is very real.

The forest industry has a long and proud tradition of providing well-paid, challenging career choices for people. For many communities around the province, it has been a major contributor to the local economy. As the forest industry continues to go through changes to meet the challenges of a highly competitive business environment, there is a need to deal with the very real and specific challenges of recruitment. Establishing a safe and professional workforce will only happen if the issues of dependable work continuity, lifestyle and job satisfaction are addressed.

# TRAINING CHALLENGES TODAY

## Entry-Level Training

The forest industry needs a professional, well-educated workforce capable of filling vacancies today and able to bridge to the next level of training as new technologies are introduced in the future.

Over the course of my interviews it was evident that very few contractors or companies are now delivering in-house training programs. Businesses at every point in the industry spectrum identified four major reasons that contributed to their decisions not to train: cost of training, retention, liability and loss of entry-level jobs.

*“If you don’t have a passion for working in the woods, or it isn’t part of your family, there’s a bigger chance you’ll pick up work in the oil sands these days. That doesn’t make training a good investment for forestry contractors.”*

### **1 – Cost of training**

In interviews, many contractors noted that the competitive and financial pressures currently felt within the forest industry, either through logging rates or log prices, did not provide the financial resources required to train. Second, neither contractors nor company operations, in order to meet production and contractual obligations, could afford to curtail production to free up either equipment or people to facilitate training.

### **2– Retention**

Contractors consistently stated that as fast as they trained an individual, they would lose them to other industries, predominately the oil and gas sector. Contractors felt that the lack of a consistent, predictable and stable work environment for themselves meant that they were unable to guarantee consistent, predictable and stable work for their employees. Training was viewed as an insecure investment. Many employers felt they needed a way to secure their investments in training, possibly through some form of indentureship contract. It was noted by many contractors that in the current operating regime, even if they could protect their training investment, their employees’ and trainees’ stability was tied to the contractors’ stability. Without some form of predictable and stable work year, that security would be difficult to achieve.

### **3 – Liability**

A number of contractors indicated that the liability attached to in-house training had increased significantly. There currently are no industry-recognized formal standards of training and competency for many of the positions within the industry. Many contractors lack confidence that the regulatory agencies will undertake an impartial investigation in the event of an accident or incident

involving a trainee, either during or after completion of the training program. The results of such an investigation could have significant business implications and, as a result, they are not prepared to take on the risks.

This comment is disturbing because it reveals a large gap in trust among the partners of the BC Forest Safety Council. This is not an economic issue and could become a much larger problem over time if a more collaborative working relationship does not develop among all of the partners in the forest sector.

#### ***4 – Loss of entry-level jobs***

The loss of the entry-level positions has eliminated a source of potential candidates for higher-level skills training. The pool of entry-level workers was a valuable source for assessing if individuals who already had a basic understanding of life in the forest industry also had the right qualities to move to more skilled functions. Now companies that are considering training workers have to choose, for the most part, individuals directly off the street, with no previous “bush” experience. This continues to add an element of risk to training that many contractors are not prepared to take on.

### **Advanced Training**

Equipment in the harvest sector today is sophisticated and expensive, and operators require a wide range of knowledge and expertise. In spite of the level of skills required, there seems to be little if any attention given by most firms to any long-term succession planning. Most businesses are looking to hire already trained and experienced people into the non-certified trade occupations (heavy equipment operator, truck driver), or are looking to other agencies to deliver the training before an employee is hired.

While there is nervousness within the industry around where the next generation of operators will come from, there is little action today on the part of individual companies to actively address this problem. The economic pressures of survival are consuming the attention of most businesses at every level, from large companies to the smallest contractor. Without a greater degree of attention being paid to where the future workforce will come from, the ability to meet the demands of creating a safe work environment will be jeopardized.

The forest industry is facing a dynamic change; it is moving from an industry where promotion and training was done internally to one where hiring and training will have to be done externally. Individuals who choose to pursue careers in the harvest sector in all likelihood will move into their forest jobs without any previous “bush” experience. In this new world, how individuals acquire their training, their experience and any formal competency rating will become an important aspect of developing a well trained, skilled, professional—**and safe**—forest workforce.

Currently there are significant realities regarding training that are impacting safety:

- The workforce shortage today is real and growing
- The inability to retain workers is a disincentive to training
- The cost of training is an obstacle
- The risks associated with in-house training are creating a disincentive
- The source of future forest workers will come from outside the industry, possibly with no “bush” experience
- Most firms today are not engaged in in-house training

## Re-Training

WorkSafeBC enquiries to the BC Forest Safety Council's Ombudsman office make up a significant portion of all enquiries this office receives. One of the roles and responsibilities of WorkSafeBC is the re-training of injured workers. As WorkSafeBC is an industry-funded organization, how that process works needs to meet the objectives of injured workers and industry alike.

A critical part of any re-training program will be that the career path chosen meets not only the needs of WorkSafeBC but, more critically, the needs of the injured worker and employers. When measuring success in any vocational rehabilitation plan, there is definitely a strong positive correlation to when a worker completes a re-training plan he "owns" and was involved in putting together.

WorkSafeBC has in place a significant number of programs that take into consideration an injured worker's physical and physiological attributes and limitations. Vocational Rehabilitation Consultants utilize psycho-vocational testing, information interviews, transferable skills analysis, etc., as well as past working experience, in developing a vocational plan for an injured worker. In the vast majority of cases this collaboration does result in providing re-training to injured workers that sees them successfully move back into the workplace.

The enquiries this office receives come from individuals who feel the vocational rehabilitation plan they are being asked to participate in does not work for them. In the absence of other choices, these individuals often either return to their original jobs or reluctantly move into the new career path that has been identified during their rehabilitation. In either situation, a fundamental question is, have we in fact put other workers at risk by having an individual working in the forest sector whose focus or physical limitations add an element of risk that is unacceptable to him or herself and to others?

WorkSafeBC retains the right to make any final determination on vocational rehabilitation through Section 16.1 of the Workers Compensation Act:

*“To aid in getting injured workers back to work or to assist in lessening or removing a resulting handicap, the Board may take the measures and make the*

*expenditures from the accident fund that it considers **necessary or expedient**, regardless of the date on which the worker first became entitled to compensation.”*

Ensuring that every individual who moves through the vocational rehabilitation process is in an occupation he or she agrees with is paramount. In the interests of establishing a safe work environment and to meet some of the other challenges facing the forest sector and other industries, a review of this section of the Workers Compensation Act should be considered.

Our workforce is aging. Many older workers have been operating equipment for a significant number of years. These equipment operators did not benefit from the ergonomic technologies that have significantly improved the working conditions of equipment operators today. Over the course of their careers, many of these workers have multiple problems with joints and muscle groups in addition to experiencing the general impacts of getting older.

If an individual is injured during the course of employment and that injury, on its own, can be repaired so that the worker can return to his or her original job, the option of any re-training **is not** available to that worker. However, the combination of an injury along with the wear and tear on a person's body over the course of a working life may put individuals in the position of having to return to a forest job they are no longer suited for. The forest industry is inherently dangerous. Having people work in jobs they may no longer be suited for may in fact create hazards for others.

The forest industry has been a seasonal business in nature. The need to be able to increase the workforce at any time to meet weather, and now market demands is a component of the industry that is unlikely to change. An aging workforce that is able to secure re-training within the industry could potentially provide some of the pool of skilled seasonal workers that the industry requires.

The Auditor General has been asked to review progress on safety in the forest sector. A review of WorkSafeBC legislation with an objective that considers good worker disability management in conjunction with good human resource policies may assist in dealing with some of the recruitment and retention issues.

The current WorkSafeBC legislation does not consider this approach in the current mandate. Legislation that facilitates re-training for injured forest workers who, through a work related injury in combination with other physical degenerative impediments, should not return to their original occupation will improve the workplace for all workers. As the shortage of workers is occurring right across the employment spectrum, a new approach could benefit every sector of the economy.

### ***Recommendations***

- 1. The Auditor General, as part of his review of safety in the forest sector, should consider the mandate of WorkSafeBC and the need to establish a new and more collaborative approach with other**

**agencies for those workers who should not necessarily be encouraged to return to their original position.**

- 2. The Auditor General should also review current WorkSafeBC requirements and procedures to consider, as part of worker rehabilitation, that the potential for retraining workers for positions within the forest sector meets the objectives of injured workers as well as industry.**

## **CURRENT TRAINING PROGRAMS**

### **New Faller Training Program (Faller Program)**

The New Faller Training Program has now been operating for one year. Over the course of the year, trainees in a number of classes have completed the program. As this program is new, it is appropriate to review the program to see if in its current form it is meeting the needs and objectives of the industry.

The Faller Program has three components:

- A 30-day instructional period where five days are spent in the classroom and 25 days are spent in the field engaged in falling and bucking activities.
- A 180-day training period that students must complete while employed in the industry.
- Ongoing evaluation that each faller receives over the course of employment. Throughout this period an active logbook is maintained and kept up to date.

The BC Forest Safety Council has also developed a Qualified Supervisor Training component. Here supervisors receive training in how to assess and supervise fallers. Faller Supervisors play the critical role of performing faller evaluation, the process by which fallers move through the competency grading system.

The goal of the BC Faller Training Standard is to ensure that anyone working as a faller has the knowledge, skills, abilities, work practices and attitude necessary to work safely and productively. As a result, the New Faller Training Program was developed so that all fallers, regardless of where they work, receive the same high-quality training and supervision.

This initiative is receiving widespread support and endorsement from all sectors. However, there are issues arising as the program becomes more broadly implemented across the industry:

1. There are a number of occupations that utilize a chainsaw to fall and buck timber in the course of their employment. Municipal employees, transmission line employees, silviculture industry employees, and Ministry of Forests fire fighting crews all utilize a chainsaw during the normal course of their employment but do not require any form of certification. The recent storms in the Lower Mainland showed on our television screens, night after night, individuals cutting fresh blow-down, something considered to be the most dangerous conditions for a faller to work in. Where these jobs may not require the full benefit of a New Faller Training Program and Faller Certification, some requirement for provincially recognized chainsaw certification should be required for these occupations.

2. WorkSafeBC requires that any tree over six inches be felled by an individual in possession of current Faller Certification. Silviculture workers, in the regular course of employment, may be required to cut saplings that could exceed six inches. The silviculture industry does not need the benefit of a full Faller Certification but rather a modified training that fits with the unique functions of this occupation.
3. A number of contractors expressed a concern that the New Faller Training Program curriculum did not include enough time in the bucking component of the trade. Historically, faller training commenced with trainees spending the initial training period in the manufacturing and bucking of timber. This provided an opportunity to evaluate the trainee on chainsaw handling techniques. It also allowed trainees to acquire an understanding of log grades and value. The emphasis on these elements is now missing from training.
4. There is some uncertainty in the marketplace about the appropriate job rate that a successful graduate would receive upon commencement of employment. Although not a safety issue, any uncertainty may create resistance in acceptance of the New Faller Training Program.
5. The cost of the current Faller Program was identified by number of individuals and contractors as an obstacle to its overall adoption by the industry. Any recommendations that extend or modify the program in ways that increase the costs to the student will only exacerbate this problem. The purpose of the Faller Program is to have “the knowledge, skills, abilities, work practices and attitude necessary to work safely and productively.” Cost should not determine curriculum.
6. Currently the New Faller Training Program has limited availability, even in those institutions offering the program. There are some contractors and company operations that are capable of delivering in-house training. There is an advantage to having the Faller Program delivered in every region of the province so that all timber types and profiles are represented. A “train the trainer” program that would expand the ability to offer the program beyond institutions that now offer it may assist in broadening current training availability without compromising the program.
7. Ministry of Forests fire fighting crews are required to fall timber in the normal course of their employment. This timber falling is undertaken in some very challenging situations and must incorporate a number of other factors that need to be considered from a fire fighting perspective. Although this is a unique application of falling and bucking techniques, components of the Faller Program should still be a requirement. A modified program that could be delivered in-house and incorporated with the other training required for fire fighting crews would assist in increasing safety for these workers.
8. The New Faller Training Program includes three components, from initial training to ongoing review and evaluation for fallers. However, the same

may not be said of the Qualified Supervisor Training. There currently is no formal program in place to follow up on supervisors. There are already inconsistencies in how individual supervisors are evaluating and rating fallers. This lack of consistency is creating another element of stress for fallers. For the Faller Program to continue to garner the support of fallers as well meet the objectives of creating a safe working environment, fallers must see a consistent application of evaluation. This is an important aspect of the New Faller Training Program and was raised by a number of fallers at meetings I attended right across the province.

### ***Recommendations***

- 3. The provincial government, through the Ministry of Advanced Education, should incorporate the New Faller Training Program into the advanced education system and financially support the program in the same manner other trades certification and pre-apprentice programs receive financial support.**
- 4. The current falling and bucking curriculum should be reviewed by industry stakeholders to ensure that the course material being offered aligns with industry and faller trainee objectives.**
- 5. WorkSafeBC and the BC Forest Safety Council should develop a specific chainsaw training program for those industries that do not require full Faller Certification, but should require some form of chainsaw certification in order to fall and buck timber safely**
- 6. The BC Forest Safety Council should give consideration to train-the-trainer programs so that industry sectors have the ability to train their own personnel. This is especially important for fire fighting crews where there is a need to provide in-house and on-site training that incorporates chainsaw certification with other aspects of fire fighting training.**
- 7. The BC Forest Safety Council should move quickly to close the loop on the Supervisor Training curriculum by putting in place a formal evaluation program.**

## Log Truck Driver Training

In the forest industry there are 24 different trailer configurations for logging trucks. Our paved public highway systems include hills with a 10% grade; however, it is not uncommon to find off-highway logging roads with 20% plus adverse. The range of skills required to operate the numerous configurations of vehicles, from low-beds to articulating rock trucks, in the variable operating conditions of BC is extensive. Yet the minimum single requirement in BC for employment as a log truck driver is a Valid Class 1 driver's licence.

*More than one contractor talked about hiring people today that they never would have considered employing in the past, but they had to put "meat in the seat."*

During the course of the interviews, several employers commented that the acute shortage of drivers was altering their hiring and training practices so that they could meet production/contractual requirements.

There are a number of factors in the province today that will significantly increase the demand for qualified truck drivers over the next decade. An aging workforce, the implementation of the new hours of work regulation, increased activity in the other resource sectors, the trucking needs predicted for the inland container port in Prince George and container port in Prince Rupert are some of the pressures this sector faces.

It is imperative today that the right foundations are put in place so that employers are not simply putting "meat in the seat," but instead have fully-qualified, trained professionals behind the wheel.

During the course of the review, training institutions, Human Resources Social Development Canada (HRSDC), Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance, ICBC and Council stakeholder groups were all engaged to see how each group's role impacted training and, by extension, the workplace.

Currently, the minimum standard for employment in the forest sector for a log truck driver is a Class 1 Driver's Licence, even though the range of vehicles, configurations and operating conditions they work in is extensive. Each group interviewed expressed a concern that the certification required for employment (Class 1 Licence) did not necessarily align with the skills required to actually perform the tasks required by the forest sector. In a market where drivers are at a premium, there was also general concern that any changes that would increase the time it takes to train a driver would compound an already stressed industry.

A number of complexities exist with log truck driving that puts additional demands on drivers. Logging operations share resources roads with the mining, gas, oil, tourism and the general public. Truck configurations and operating conditions vary significantly from the Interior to the coast. The Interior utilizes predominately highway-logging trucks; the coast still operates larger off-highway rigs in some locations. Winter driving conditions vary significantly across the province.

Agencies that fund training, for the most part, fund programs that lead to the minimum requirement for employment. An individual could take a Class 1 Driver's course in one week, practising on the public highways pulling a single container van. Upon successful completion of a course, that driver could find him or herself on a mountain switchback with a 17% adverse, pulling a short logger. This is, in many critical ways, an entirely different occupation than that for which the driver was trained.

Discussions with training facilities highlighted that, although they offer off-road programs, these are significantly more expensive than a standard Class 1 course. In many situations, it is budget decisions that dictate the requirement to train an individual to only the minimum level to achieve employment.

WorkSafeBC is one agency that appears to fund comprehensive training and re-training programs for injured workers to meet employment objectives, but this is not the case for other funding agencies.

While this review is meant to look at the forest industry, recommending and applying any change in one industry sector without a look at the others may not improve the workplace from a safety perspective. Because the forest sector shares the bush roads and provincial highways with every industrial sector, we need to take a common approach to truck driver training.

There is a need to review the range of vehicles that can be operated under the Class 1 category. Many of the stakeholders and regulators expressed a concern about the introduction of any graduated licensing system within the current Class 1 model. The fear of adding more time to any training regime with a timeline-driven system could have significant negative effects on the general trucking industry across the province.

This review is focusing on the safety aspects of training and certification and, while economics needs to be a consideration, it is not the prime purpose of the review. The following recommendations are provided in that context:

## **Recommendations**

- 8. The BC Forest Safety Council should develop a province-wide competency certification model for drivers employed in the forest industry. The certification program could operate in the manner of a "passport," a series of endorsements qualifying drivers to operate in specific areas of the industry, over and above the basic Class 1 requirements for commercial drivers. Over time, the BC Drivers Abstract should be used to track individual driver endorsements.**
- 9. Any changes that recognize a formal endorsement and competency rating should be included in the SAFE Companies Audit.**

**10. As the forest industry shares the highways with every other resource industry and the general public, the Council should engage the other major resource industry groups, ICBC and the BC Trucking Association to develop a provincial approach to a truck driver competency/endorsement model.**

The benefit of this proposed system is unlike a graduated driver program with set time periods. The endorsement model allows for an individual to move through the various competency levels at rates that reflect his or her individual skills.

Training institutions would be able to design programs that target specific endorsement levels. In this way, employers and employees can choose to take the appropriate training at any time to acquire and move through the endorsement process at a rate they choose.

Funding agencies would be able to direct dollars to training programs to meet specific endorsement levels that move individuals to employment in particular transportation sectors.

Requiring a common benchmark across the trucking industry will ensure a common standard is applied on all resource roads and highways regardless of the industry. Employers of truck drivers will have a clear understanding, regardless of where they operate, of the level of training an individual has received and will require.

## **NON-CERTIFIED TRADES TRAINING**

As mentioned earlier in this report, the forest sector of BC is going through many dynamic changes. The most significant, from a training perspective, is the need to move from internal hiring and promotion to an external approach in terms of where and how future employees will be recruited. It is essential for the forest industry to recognize this change if it is to start to deal with the critical issues of recruitment and retention.

As the industry continues to look outside of itself to attract new individuals into the many career options, the need to develop a clear and transparent route to employment is essential. It took more than a decade to develop the Faller Certification Program. With the imminent labour shortages and challenges around recruitment and retention, I do not believe the industry has the luxury of taking another decade to complete this work.

For the purpose of this section, the non-certified trades I am referring to are the equipment operator job categories that make up the harvest sector of the forest industry. These include, but are not limited to, grapple yarder/loader operator, back hoe/road builder operator, feller-buncher operator, timber processor operator, skidder operator, boom boat/log dump and dryland sort equipment operator positions.

Historically, the industry selected trainees from within company operations or hired from a readily available pool of trained personnel. Neither of these options now exists. Today, few businesses are actively engaged in training. The cost of training and the inability to tie up both people and equipment in the training process is driving the industry to look elsewhere for some entity to deliver the expensive front-end training.

There are a number of aspects that must be considered as non-certified training moves from in-house and informal to externally delivered skill development.

- As with many other industries, initial skill sets for the forest industry will have to be acquired through some form of accredited and recognized training certification program.
- The industry will need to establish a clear definition of what “certification” will look like for the various equipment operator and job classifications in the harvest sector.
- That definition will need to be acceptable and recognized across the industry and in every region of the province. Log Haul Truck Driver and the New Faller Training Program may provide a template for developing the process.
- Clearly defined and recognizable levels of competency/endorsements must be established. This is the critical piece that lets any employer, regardless of where they operate in the province, have a clear understanding of the types of working conditions and environment that an

individual is qualified to work in. This is not only important for the employer, but also for the safety of other employees or contractors who are working on the same job site.

- Certification endorsements will also establish what training is required to allow that individual to be able to progress in order to work in a greater variety of operating conditions. It will clearly establish the route from job entry to fully “certified.”

In determining the process for ongoing training/certification, the industry will need to assess whether to pursue a time-based or competency-based system of progression for individuals. A competency-based system does provide greater flexibility for individuals and employers in achieving certification status and would align with the recommendations on Truck Driving. However, a time-based system is easier to measure and control.

The industry will need to clearly establish the front-end competencies and skill set requirements for each of the job classifications. This, historically, was the more expensive and intensive one-on-one training that employers provided. Establishing a clear set of objectives for the front-end training will permit the development of an industry-approved curriculum that can be delivered by either public or private accredited post-secondary institutions or training facilities.

Once post-secondary institutions or training facilities have adopted an industry-approved curriculum to deliver, then a clear route to employment for any individual looking to pursue a career in the harvest sector is available. This will assist in bolstering the workforce in an industry currently facing shortages, as training institutions can be an effective marketing tool to attract individuals to the forest sector as a career option. It will also be important for these routes to employment to be available and accessible in several regions of the province, if possible.

As this training may be provided by both public or/and private institutions, the role of funding partners in allowing individuals to access affordable education becomes an important component of marketing these programs. There have been concerns raised by both fallers and employers over the current cost of the New Faller Training Program. Any move to modify or add to the Faller Program in any way that increases costs to the students is an issue.

Currently, the provincial government supports other industry sectors by providing funding for training through the public post-secondary education system. If we are to increase safety in the workplace through training, course curriculum cannot be curtailed by cost. The development of a safe, professional workforce will be measured by program content, not dollars and cents. Any and all training courses should be entirely based on pre-employment skill set requirements as developed by the industry. The role of public institutions in supporting the forest sector in same way it supports other trades training is essential.

Any new entrant into the forest sector will require a higher level of skills than has been demanded of individuals in the past. If we are to attract new people into the

industry, then a clear path from the “street” to the professions in the forest industry needs to be identified. As the new forest workforce may well have no previous “bush” experience, firm standards for training and certification must be established.

As we consider where new entrants to the forest sector will come from, we cannot and should not overlook the needs of a segment of British Columbia’s population that traditionally made up a significant portion of the forest industry workforce. In every region of the province there is currently a local underutilized workforce in the First Nations communities. Many of these workers previously employed in the forest industry were unable to make the technical transition that changes in the industry demanded through the 1980s and ’90s.

As governments and industry move to find solutions to their recruitment challenges, this population is receiving special consideration and attention. There are good initiatives under way in a number of regions across the province to address the issues of pre-employment readiness training for First Nations people, life-skills training and Aboriginal commercial driver training.

To ensure that this segment of BC’s population is not marginalized in the future, both governments and industry need to pay attention to the comprehensive training requirements for First Nations people. It is important to ensure that care is taken in developing and funding any training program to include pre-educational requirements as part of those programs. To provide sector-specific training (e.g., equipment operation) without including Grade 12-equivalency certification only ensures that as technology evolves this segment of the population will be marginalized once again.

Part of establishing new certification standards will require consideration about how to grandfather existing operators. The Faller Training Standards Program can provide a model for how this can be developed and applied.

Although these suggestions deal specifically with the equipment operator positions, as this is the area of greatest safety risk today, there are a number of ground positions for which job descriptions also need to be determined. Recognizing that a lot of this formal work may have already been done through the collective agreement process, a formal method of establishing and certifying these job categories may need to be considered at some time in the future.

## **Recommendations**

**11. The BC Forest Safety Council should take the lead, working with industry, to identify and develop industry definitions of the non-certified trade job classifications and functions within the forest harvest sector.**

**12. The BC Forest Safety Council should take the lead in developing a standard competency/endorsement model for each of the job classifications.**

- 13. The provincial government, through the Ministry of Advanced Education, should incorporate all of the non-certified training programs into advanced education curriculums and resource them in the same manner it supports other industry trades training.**
- 14. The BC Forest Safety Council, working with industry, should develop the front-end training curriculum that would be delivered through an accredited, post secondary educational institution or private/industry training facility.**

## STRESS AND SAFETY

During the course of the interviews, an issue raised by nearly every party that merits comment is “stress in the workplace.” A significant number of people engaged in this review identified that they personally felt the level of stress they experience has increased significantly over the last decade. This issue was raised by individuals and groups right across the industry spectrum, from employees to sub-contractors, contractors’ licencees and regulators.

The forest sector is and has been going through dynamic change during the past decade. The combination and pressures of changing technology, changing environmental operating pressures, changes to harvesting techniques, changing management regimes, changes in legislation, competition from other industries for skilled workers, lack of continuity of work, and general economic pressures all add significant challenges to the forest sector and everyone who works in it.

While increased stress levels are a personal and individual health concern, they also impact a worker’s ability to stay focused on the job. Whether the stress is real or perceived, it creates a distraction in the workplace and is an underlying contributing factor in accidents.

*The wife of one contractor who recently died of a heart attack observed that the stress of working in the forest industry is the “elephant in the room” that is never mentioned, but always present.*

I include the subject of stress as part of this review to emphasize the importance I put on the issue as a safety factor. As you have read throughout this report, the one constant for the forest industry over the past and the next decade is “change.” The operating environment, for everyone who works in the industry, is not going to get any easier. Learning how to manage the day-to-day pressures of this competitive industry is essential to being successful. If we are to overcome the tremendous challenges of recruitment and retention, improving the working environment will be core to attracting and keeping people to work in the industry.

The forest industry should consider holding a stakeholder meeting to deal specifically with “stress in the workplace.” An open forum dedicated to this issue may be helpful in providing the stakeholders with some guidance on how to manage the pressures being felt in the changing environment of the forest sector.

I do not expect this forum will provide the solution to the stress individuals are experiencing, but could be a start in recognizing that the issue is real and begin a process of assisting workers and families in managing those pressures.

### **Recommendation**

- 15. The BC Forest Safety Council should take the lead, working with forest industry stakeholders, to hold a stakeholder meeting to deal specifically with stress in the workplace.**

## Conclusion

This concludes my first Ombudsman's Review. I hope this review and its recommendations provide a framework for discussion for solutions to recruitment, training, retention and certification that will ensure safety in the BC forest industry.

Training, recruitment, retention, certification and safety are all complex issues and a coordinated response is needed by all agencies, companies, contractors and individuals involved in the industry. My hope is that the BC Forest Safety Council will continue to play a significant role in advocating for safety and to provide leadership to the industry in finding solutions to ensure a viable and safe industry for the future.

I'm most grateful for the time and thoughtful comments from a wide range of companies, contractors, employees, agencies and individuals who shared their thoughts on safety and the challenges ahead for the forest industry. We know that we are "Not Out of the Woods" yet on forest safety. My sincere hope is that we have identified some of the key issues and set in place a context for discussion so that potential solutions to the challenges that face this industry can be identified more quickly.

I look forward to continuing my work as industry Ombudsman and I welcome input on my initial report as well as future suggestions on safety improvements in BC's forest industry.



Roger Harris  
BC Forest Safety Council Ombudsman

January 15, 2007

## **APPENDIX A -- RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Re-Training**

- 1. The Auditor General, as part of his review of safety in the forest sector, should consider the mandate of WorkSafeBC and the need to establish a new and more collaborative approach with other agencies for those workers who should not necessarily be encouraged to return to their original position.**
- 2. The Auditor General should also review current WorkSafeBC requirements and procedures to consider, as part of worker rehabilitation, that the potential for retraining workers for positions within the forest sector meets the objectives of injured workers as well as industry.**

### **Faller Training**

- 3. The provincial government, through the Ministry of Advanced Education, should incorporate the New Faller Training Program into the advanced education system and financially support the program in the same manner other trades certification and pre-apprentice programs receive financial support.**
- 4. The current falling and bucking curriculum should be reviewed by industry stakeholders to ensure that the course material being offered aligns with industry and faller trainee objectives.**
- 5. WorkSafeBC and the BC Forest Safety Council should develop a specific chainsaw training program for those industries that do not require full Faller Certification, but should require some form of chainsaw certification in order to fall and buck timber safely**
- 6. The BC Forest Safety Council should give consideration to train-the-trainer programs so that industry sectors have the ability to train their own personnel. This is especially important for fire fighting crews where there is a need to provide in-house training that incorporates chainsaw certification with other aspects of fire fighting training.**
- 7. The BC Forest Safety Council should move quickly to close the loop on the Supervisor Training curriculum by putting in place a formal evaluation program.**

## **Log Truck Driver Training**

- 8. The BC Forest Safety Council should develop a province-wide competency certification model for the drivers employed in the forest industry. The certification program could operate in the manner of a "passport," a series of endorsements qualifying drivers to operate in specific areas of the industry, over and above the basic Class 1 requirements for commercial drivers. Over time, the BC Drivers Abstract should be used to track individual driver endorsements.**
- 9. Any changes that recognize a formal endorsement and competency rating should be included in the SAFE Companies Audit.**
- 10. As the forest industry shares the highways with every other resource industry and the general public, the Council should engage the other major resource industry groups, ICBC and the BC Trucking Association to develop a provincial approach to a truck driver competency/endorsement model.**

## **Non-Certified Trades Training**

- 11. The BC Forest Safety Council should take the lead, working with industry, to identify and develop industry definitions of the non-certified trade job classifications and functions within the forest harvest sector.**
- 12. The BC Forest Safety Council should take the lead in developing a standard competency/endorsement model for each of the job classifications.**
- 13. The provincial government, through the Ministry of Advanced Education, should incorporate all of the non-certified training programs into advanced education curriculums and resource them in the same manner it supports other industry trades training.**
- 14. The BC Forest Safety Council, working with industry, should develop the front-end training curriculum that would be delivered through an accredited, post secondary educational institution or private/industry training facility.**

## **Stress and Safety**

- 15. The BC Forest Safety Council should take the lead, working with forest industry stakeholders, to hold a stakeholder meeting to deal specifically with stress in the workplace.**

## **APPENDIX B -- ROSTER OF INTERVIEWS**

### **August 2006:**

Campbell River	TLA Contractor
Burns Lake	Trucking Association
Duncan	Forest Workers Support Group
Comox	Steelworkers Fallers Group
Prince George	Truck Driver Contractors
	Industrial Training Institutions
Quesnel	Logging Contractors

### **October 2006:**

Prince George	Industrial Training Institutions
	Trucking/Logging Contractors
Quesnel	Logging Contractors
Terrace	Ministry of Forests
Vernon	Interior Logging Contractors
Midway	Interior Logging Contractor
	Pope & Talbot
Terrace	WorkSafeBC
Kitimat	Kitimat Valley Institute

### **November 2006:**

Vancouver	Western Forest Products
Victoria	ICBC
Holberg	Western Forest Products
	United Steelworkers
Port McNeil	Western Forest Products
Campbell River	United Steelworkers
Black Creek	Fallers Group
Terrace	WorkSafeBC
Quesnel	Central Interior Logging Contractor
Burnaby	Human Resources Social Development Canada
Vernon	Interior Logging Association Board
Vancouver	Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance

### **December 2006:**

Vancouver	Ministry of Forests
	Vancouver Wood Manufacturer
	Western Silviculture Association
Prince George	Employment Services Group

## **APPENDIX C -- INITIATIVES CURRENTLY IN PROGRESS IN THE FOREST INDUSTRY**

### ***BC Faller Training Standard and Certification Program – Qualified***

***Supervisor Training:*** Program created for supervisors to incorporate the BC Faller Training Standard into the workplace.

***Forestry TruckSafe:*** Comprehensive strategy to reduce incidence of injuries and fatalities in the transportation sector of the forest industry, including log hauling, chips and lumber transport, and travelling to and from work in BC's forests.

***BC SAFE Silviculture:*** Program focused on the safety needs and issues of workers in tree planting, cone picking, brushing, weeding, spacing and fire fighting.

***SAFE Companies Program:*** An initiative ensuring that companies, large, medium and small, have in place effective and verifiable safety programs and systems.

***SAFE Companies Program – Safety Advocates:*** A program for trained individuals to work with small and medium sized forest harvesting firms to guide them with the development and implementation of effective safety programs and procedures.