

## Event Summary

### New forest safety program saves \$80 million a year

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#### New forest safety program to save \$80 million a year

By Terry Hadley

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The B.C. forest industry's new SAFE Companies program will be accepting company registrations from the end of October in a bid to reduce injury and fatality costs by half, projected to save \$216 million over three years.

"And even then losses would still be more than Alberta, so it's a realistic target and should be more like 80 per cent," Tanner Elton, chief executive officer of the BC Forest Safety Council told The Vancouver Board of Trade.

"Right now, we have the highest record of 'unsafe' of any industry in B.C., and we are going to turn that around," said Elton

year period 2003-2005.

The impact of the forest sector's safety performance was identified in a report entitled *The Cost of Unsafe*, which the Council released publicly on the day of Elton's speech to The Board. Total expenditures for injuries, fatalities and related injury expenses reached a total of \$432 million over the three-

Compliance with safety programs is predicted to provide a "safety dividend" of more than \$80 million a year.

Developed by the Council in conjunction with industry and WorkSafeBC, the SAFE Companies program will require annual certification for B.C. forest companies meeting and exceeding required safety standards. The program receives no government funding. "This is industry-driven," said Elton.

The resulting SAFE companies that have all the required safety programs in place will benefit from rebates to their Workers' Compensation assessments and from reduced injuries and lost time.

The report estimates that current losses to B.C.'s largest industry include \$108 million in direct costs and \$324 million in indirect costs over the three years. A 50 per cent cut is predicted to save \$54 million in direct costs and \$162 million in indirect costs — the equivalent of 1,600 fewer short-term disability claims, 485 fewer longer-term disability claims, and 2,000 fewer health-care only claims over the same three-year time period.

Direct costs include increased assessments levied by WorkSafeBC, medical and rehabilitation expenses, first aid, sick pay, and legal expenses. The indirect costs of workplace injuries and fatalities borne by employers and employees include impact on family and community, damage to corporate image, production downtime, lost time for staff to cope, reduced morale, investigation costs, training for replacement workers, and re-orientation for returning workers.

"We had a bad year last year — by our count, 43 fatalities... in the harvesting sector, 34," said Elton. "The message here is we can't afford not to do this."

He concluded, "Right now, we have the highest record of 'unsafe' of any industry in B.C., and we are going to turn that around — unsafe is unacceptable."

For more details on the Safe Companies program and *The Cost of Unsafe* report, see [www.bcforestsafe.org](http://www.bcforestsafe.org) or call 604-632-0211.