

Ombudsman Announces Review of Resource Road Safety
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Resource Roads will be the focus of the second comprehensive review to be conducted by BC's Forest Safety Ombudsman, Roger Harris.

Harris will look at how to improve their function and safety for people in the industry and the general public who use them.

Resource roads were the source of 41 different requests for assistance in Harris's first year as Ombudsman, making it the number one issue.

Some of the problems raised are:

- road maintenance,
- cycle times,
- hours of work,
- road construction,
- funding,
- jurisdictional responsibility and
- financial responsibility.

Resource roads make up the majority of transportation lines in the province. There are 47,000 kilometres of public roads in B.C., while resource roads account for more than 650 thousand kilometres, and they are growing.

Problem is, the resource roads aren't just for resources anymore. "The roads were built for an entirely different clientele" says Harris, "Now they are being used not only for forestry, but oil and gas, mining, public recreation, and eco tourism and the volume of traffic on these roads is increasing."



The Forest Safety Ombudsman told Opinion250 that even if the work in the woods declines because of a downturn in the market, the activity on the roads will continue to increase "Even without forestry, it is an issue for everybody, and it's going to be more of an issue."

Harris says the matter is complex, "I have learned that by the time an issue reaches my office, it won't be an easy one to resolve, to start off with, there are jurisdictional issues, who is responsible for maintenance, what role does the Ministry play, or the RCMP? These are all questions that need to be answered."

Harris says he problem is familiar. "It is not unlike the first report we did where we found that once you left the cut block, no one was really in charge until you hit the highway. There is no one with an overriding responsibility."

The problem may be that with responsibility comes liability "That is a good question, and it is possible liability will be one of the recommendations in the final report."

In 2005, 11 logging truck drivers died on the job which accounted for 26 per cent of the total fatalities in the forest sector that year. In 2006, there were fewer truck driver fatalities, but the deaths accounted for 42 per cent, or five of the 12, total forest sector fatalities that year. So far in 2007, no logging truck drivers have died but 12 have been injured, some seriously.

That's not to say there hasn't been a great deal of work done to reduce injuries and fatalities. Harris acknowledges the Forestry TruckSafe program has made significant progress:

- a cost-sharing formula for resource road maintenance has been developed,
- adopted vehicle identification plates for trucks,
- established regular communication regarding hazards and
- managed technical development work on steep-slope hauling standards.
- Council staff also met with more than 6,000 truckers and owners throughout the province to discuss safety initiatives and challenges.

Still, Harris says there needs to be more "We continue to see serious injuries and fatalities in trucking and truck-related incidents. It's time to figure out what's going on and do something about it."

Harris expects to complete his review by the end of this year, and the final report will likely be released early in the new year.

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