

# BC Forest Safety Ombudsman Report | 2013 – 2014

## Message from Roger Harris

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### 2013 BC Forest Safety Ombudsman Review

#### Introduction

This is the seventh annual report from the Forest Safety Ombudsman office. While our last two reports focused on accident statistics, this report considers the processes that the BCFS Council and industry have embarked on to reverse a trend that has seen an increase in the number of serious injuries and fatalities in the past two years.

#### Outstanding Issues

Over the last seven years, in our opinion, the forest sector has seen a cultural shift in how individual workers, sub-contractors, contractors, licensees and government view safety. No longer do programs or initiatives represent a “flavor of the month” approach to safety but rather, as an ingrained and integral component of everyday activities, on a par with other components of business. Today, industry talks about safe production. Safety and production are no longer considered in silos. This is a subtle but important shift in how we approach the everyday activities of people working in the industry.

With accident statistics remaining too high and moving in the wrong direction, we feel it is time to change our focus. Our review this year considers the placement of relevant processes and structures that will establish an environment where the likelihood of injury or death is reduced and a downward trend in accident statistics is sustainable.

Over the last number of years, the BCFS Council has introduced a number of initiatives targeted at improving safety outcomes for workers. Our office has commented on a number of these and whether or not they are achieving the goals they have set for themselves. Our report on Safe Companies in 2009, while endorsing the concept of safety initiatives, raised a number of concerns. BCFS Council has been embarking on reshaping the process with a ground up rather than a top down approach through the Safe Companies Certification process. Our office feels this will create greater support and buy-in from the stakeholders that, rather than being viewed as a bureaucratic process, is now seen as a relevant tool for assisting companies in improving safety outcomes.

The evolution and expansion of the Faller Certification program and Faller Supervision Program add greater depth to the certifications themselves and establish essential standards of professionalism. This is an important component of the effort to develop a sustainable process that moves safety from being a program to being an integrated part of each and every day.



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Our office has raised concerns over the relationship between the BCFSC as the certifying agency and WSBC as the regulator. In our view, this has not worked as effectively as it should. The lack of clarity between the roles of these organizations, from the perspective of companies, contractors, sub-contractors and individual workers, has in the past created more confusion and frustration than benefit. For Contractors and people in the field there was not a clear understanding of the role of each which lead, in many cases, to a high degree of frustration and distraction for the industry. Our office has been encouraged to see both of these organizations working to improve their understanding of each other's roles and remove another area of frustration and distraction for each sector in the industry.

A large part of our office's function, aside from initiating reviews or facilitating solutions for specific disputes, is to direct enquiries to relevant agencies or the BCFS Council itself. The timeliness and response from the BCFSC today is a change from five years ago and has been extremely helpful in resolving many issues that may otherwise become more serious problems.

Our office has seen a fundamental shift in the forest sector from a safety perspective. The environment is shifting in a way that our office believes will have a more lasting effect on driving the accident statistics down. The culture of this sector is transitioning.

We cannot lose sight that the forest sector still experiences an accident rate that is significantly higher than the overall provincial average.

Cycle times, the negotiating of a truck rate as a business decision and the determination of a cycle time as a safety issue, continues to be an ongoing issue. Cycle time challenges are not unique to the forest sector, they are also an issue for the general trucking industry as a whole and possibly, the final solution for this may lie in a broader multi-industry approach to solving the problem.

The BC Government's reluctance to expand requirements for Safe Certification of companies beyond BC Timber Sales, in our opinion, is an obstacle to improving safety outcomes.

Our office, again this year, has received enquiries for assistance in the area dealing with "abuse in the workplace." Abuse is a difficult issue to resolve as it is less obvious and in many ways leaves no visible scars; nonetheless, it is a serious work place issue that creates an unsafe environment not only for the individuals involved but also for other workers and the public.

Our office began, in 2013, a review of previous reports and the recommendations that flowed from those and that work continues. We anticipate providing a summary report by September 2014 on the final outcome and recommendations.



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## Outreach

As part of the Ombudsman office outreach, we continue to participate in a number of the forest industry conventions, including Truck Loggers Association, Council of Forest Industries and Western Silvicultural Contractors' Association. We will continue to participate in industry events in the upcoming year.

The number of calls and requests to the Office stayed about the same in 2013 as in 2012. The range of topics included Safe Companies, Faller Certification Program, Faller Supervision Program, Abuse and Cycle Time. We were able to utilize the resources of the BCFS Council in resolving a number of the questions relevant to the Fallers programs and Safe Companies in a very timely manner.

## 2014 – Primary Focus

While this year's Annual Review has focused on the actions being taken by the industry to reverse the recent trends, and our office is encouraged by those activities, our role in continuing to monitor the activities of the forest sector is to assist them to achieve their goals and objectives. This will be our primary focus in 2014/2015. The goal of zero accidents is the only acceptable target and, like the rest of the industry, it will continue to be the object of our office's focus.



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## BC FOREST SAFETY OMBUDSMAN

Toll Free: 1-877-577-7766

Email 1: [harris@bcforestsafe.org](mailto:harris@bcforestsafe.org)

Email 2: [rharris@harrispalmer.ca](mailto:rharris@harrispalmer.ca) or

Email 3: [Roger-Harris@telus.net](mailto:Roger-Harris@telus.net)

420 Albert Street  
Nanaimo, BC V9R 2V7

## THE OMBUDSMAN OFFICE

The Office of the Forest Safety Ombudsman enhances safety in the BC forest sector by becoming 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 clear mandate to investigate safety issues and recommend the best means to address them. The Ombudsman uses review, recommendation, mediation and conciliation where necessary and also relies on international experience and leading examples of success to inform the process.

## ABOUT THE BC FOREST SAFETY COUNCIL

The BC Forest Safety Council works with forestry employers, workers, contractors and the government to make BC's forests safer. It is a not-for-profit society consisting of forestry organizations and supported by WorkSafeBC and the provincial government.



## ABOUT THE OMBUDSMAN, ROGER HARRIS

BC's first Forest Safety Ombudsman is Roger Harris, who was appointed in 2006. Harris has been actively involved in the forest industry since he was 19 and has experience in many areas of the forest sector. He has worked as a dishwasher in a logging camp, been a board member for a Local of the IWA, has owned and operated his own phase logging contract business and was appointed Minister of State for Forestry Operations during his tenure as a MLA.

Harris knows firsthand the importance of safety and the impact that injuries and fatalities can have on workers and their families. In 1986 while working as a falling contractor, his right hand was nearly severed when his chainsaw kicked back. His brother-in-law was killed in a forestry accident at age 18.

