

Graduation Day

A faller training program from the BC Forest Safety Council takes the classroom to the woods in the hopes of reducing the industry's tragic accident rate.



A group of students from the BC Forest Safety Council faller training program completed their 30-day formal instruction program at a worksite near Port Alberni on Vancouver Island this past October. They demonstrated their new falling skills to employers and Council representatives before being hired by falling contractors and heading into a six-month work experience program.

The eight trainees, representing the new face of safe logging, completed the first part of the Council's new Faller Certification Program at Malaspina University-College in Nanaimo, BC. They are the third such group to take the comprehensive training program, which starts with five days of class work followed by 25 days of closely supervised field training.

The trainees are now in the midst of the second part of the program, which includes up to 180 days of actual falling experience with a forestry employer. Trainees who successfully complete the training and work experience program are entitled to take a written exam followed by a field evaluation to become a certified faller.

Launched in response to the BC industry's dreadful safety record during 2005, and a damning report by the Western Fallers Association, the program represents an industry first, where safe falling practices are taught in both the classroom and the workplace.

"The new faller training program ensures trainees know the importance of arriving mentally and physically prepared, equipped and ready for work," explains Bill Bolton, head of the Faller Certification Program for the B.C. Forest Safety Council. "The bottom line is this training will teach fallers to do their job safely, ensuring that everyone returns home safe at the end of the work day."

Qualified supervisor trainer Steve Telosky watches while faller trainee Eric Sigurdsson falls a tree on a job site near Port Alberni, BC. Among other things, part one of the new Faller Certification program requires trainees to demonstrate safe falling skills in the field prior to moving on to a 180-day work experience program. (Photo courtesy Niomi Pearson)



It is now mandatory for all fallers in BC to be certified. More than 3,000 working fallers have already been evaluated and received certification over the 18-month mandatory certification period. This "grand fathering" clause takes care of existing fallers. The Council's new Faller Training Program is aimed at making sure new fallers entering the workforce are properly trained, prepared to work in a safe and productive manner, and ready to be certified in their own right. Like many apprentice-style training programs, such new fallers will still need the guidance and hands-on advice from new employers and experienced colleagues to become fully productive and safe fallers, but the program gives them the right start.

Based on the BC Faller Training Standard, the new faller training program reinforces three key aspects of a professional tree faller: recognizing hazards and completing a risk assessment of each situation before making any cuts; continuously improving workmanship; and seeking qualified assistance when the faller is unsure of his or her abilities or requires help.

"If you want to work as a faller in this province, you have to be certified. It's not an option anymore," says Bolton. "The program offers an opportunity to get that certification to become a professional faller and work in one of the toughest and most satisfying occupations in the forestry sector."

The pilot program consists of four groups of trainees; two courses have been completed at North Island College in



As part of his 25-day field training, Ryan Sampson prepares a tree for falling at a worksite near Port Alberni, BC.

Campbell River and two sessions will run at Malaspina University-College in Nanaimo. The second course at Malaspina started on October 30.

In 2007, new faller training will be offered throughout BC, with the BC Forest Safety Council monitoring the quality of the training. To find out more about the new faller certification program, visit the Council's website at www.bcforestsafe.org or call 250-724-2813



Busy year for BC Forest Safety

If 2005 was the worst year on record for forest worker fatalities in BC, with 43 recorded, then 2006 has been among the most active for developing and implementing safety initiatives. Both the BC Forest Safety Council and WorkSafeBC have responded to the events and negative publicity of 2005 with a slew of programs, including:

- **SAFE Companies:** Undoubtedly the biggest of the new programs, this was officially launched in September 2006 just months after having been announced. The SAFE Companies program certifies forest companies that have exceeded all required safety programs, and that are committed to making safety a business priority.

"We announced the program in January 2006 and in just nine months it's ready for implementation," said Tanner Elton, CEO of the BC Forest Safety Council this past September. "Full introduction of SAFE Companies and other health and safety initiatives currently underway are fundamentally changing how the sector manages safety."

SAFE was developed by the BC Forest Safety Council with input from industry and WorkSafeBC, and requires annual certification for BC forest companies. The Council expects all companies to be part of the program by the end of 2007.

Up to 4,000 large and small companies can benefit from rebates to their Workers' Compensation assessments and from reduced injuries and lost time. More importantly, they must review the effectiveness of their safety programs each

and every year. As 2006's main safety program, it is expected to improve both safety and bottom lines.

"As the industry's safety record improves, there will be fewer claims and the costs, currently the highest in BC, will also go down," says program director Steve Mueller. "Improved safety performance will also be reflected in the sector's competitiveness and bottom line."

- **Bottom line persuasion:** In fact, the correlation between safety and profitability was identified in another Safety Council initiative, a report called *The Cost of Unsafe*, also released in September 2006. The link between safety and money was first highlighted in the Western Fallers Association's damning state-of-the-nation report in late 2005, which made a convincing case that much of the BC industry was pressuring fallers to cut safety corners to save time and money. Actually, this new report makes the case that even when only money is concerned, cutting safety corners costs more than it saves. It considered the forestry harvesting sector's safety performance for three years, from 2003 to 2005, and estimates that total expenditures for injuries, fatalities and related injury expenses to industry was \$432 million over the three-year period, including \$108 million in direct costs and \$324 million in indirect costs.

The council's Elton noted that the program's goal of a 50% reduction in fatalities and injuries, which would match

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current industry standards in Alberta, would save more than \$216 million, including \$54 million in direct costs and \$162 million in indirect costs.

"We know that safe companies are successful companies," he concluded.

- **Keep on trucking:** High traffic volumes in short winter hauling periods can make driving along BC resource roads and even remote highways a risky business. Whether hauling logs or chips, driving to or from a shift, or just touring on a day off, accidents or near misses are a way of life. Recognizing this, the Safety Council has an entire

program dedicated to forest transport called BC Forest TruckSafe, which implemented several programs in 2006. One involved a community outreach program to educate the public and industry on the risks associated with remote and resource road networks, and on the need to share the road safely (similar to a Quebec program launched a few years back). It includes radio spots across the province. A second examined the specific risks and risk factors of resource road use by First Nations Communities.

Whether by coincidence or not, 2006 turned out to be a much better year for forest workers. The 11 fatalities that occurred was not only a fraction of 2005's total, but also far below the average 27 annual fatalities in the 10 years from 1993 to 2003.

For a safe 2007

Here are a few reminders to help start the New Year off on safe footing no matter where you work.

- **CO:** This silent killer returns with a vengeance come winter and sealed working conditions at camps or service trailers. It's past time to verify CO detectors and gen set exhausts.
- **Eye safety:** At one time more a concern for mill workers, this is at long last getting the attention of forestry folks. An issue for maintenance workers of course, but also a concern for anyone who blazes trail for a living. Recent incidents getting folks thinking include a forester in northern BC who needed surgery to remove thorns from her eye when the vegetation she stepped on during timber cruising swung up and struck her face. Safety goggles are recommended for cruising work, or any other time you need to walk through the woods (i.e. walking out to your machine, especially at night).
- **Maintaining safety:** More reports of mechanics being injured or killed while working on gear stress the need to create and strictly adhere to power down and lock-out procedures. The most recent involved a Canfor contractor north of Prince George. He was repairing an encoder

on the measuring system of a harvesting head when the grab arms inadvertently closed and crushed him to death.

- **Shot safety:** Despite near-fatal accidents and warnings, CFI staff still sees processor and harvester operators placing the saw bar directly in line with themselves or other workers while bucking, even among highly-trained Scandinavian operators. Chain shot can easily penetrate standard harvester or forwarder windows. Ditto high rotation hot saws.
- **Cold realities:** We're not your mothers, but do you have warm gear in your vehicle, helicopter, or machine in the event of an accident or break-down? At -35° and 50 km from camp, this is more than a matter of comfort.
- **Close calls:** Finally, near misses could just as easily have been serious injuries or fatalities, so when one occurs, make sure to spread the news among colleagues, safety associations, supervisors, fellow contractors and even CFI Magazine at 1-888-457-3155, ext 24; sjamieson@forest-communications.com.

Have a safe year.



Operators need to remember that chain shot can easily penetrate a standard harvester or forestry excavator cab.

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