

FOREST SAFETY • health & safety



BC Forest Safety Council
Unsafe is Unacceptable

Forest Safety: Make the Regs Serve You

by Steve Mueller and Bill Bolton
BC Forest Safety Council

Safety regulations should serve you, not the other way around – but you need to know how to use them. Consider this: WorkSafeBC officers wrote 665 orders against timber harvesting employers last year, based on inspections of just 300 forestry work sites. They found one-fourth with no designated supervisors, while two-thirds of the supervisors present weren't properly trained to oversee the work they were responsible for.

Across the sector, that's a serious issue with painful human and financial costs. Now the BC Forest Safety Council is tackling the problem with a new basic forest supervisor training that is designed to let:

- Employers demonstrate due diligence and satisfy requirements for SAFE certification (another Council program becoming a minimum BC standard for forest operations).
- Individual supervisors meet their own obligations under the law.
- Forest workers count on able supervision to help them get home in one piece.

The basic forest supervisor's course, available to anyone, offers two days of classroom instruction and one day applying those lessons in the bush. It's also the foundation for a two-day specialized faller supervisor training program. Both the basic supervisor and faller supervisor training programs are offered in large centers and in small communities throughout the province. Later this year, we plan to give those completing both courses the opportunity to become certified faller supervisors. By the end of 2008, we hope to be running other specialized training that, with the basic course, leads to certification of supervisors in mechanized harvesting, log hauling, silviculture and other specialties.

All this builds on what supervisors *must have* to function effectively and protect workers. The foundation of the training rests on two

simple facts. First, supervisors are legally obligated to ensure their workers' safety and to know both the BC Workers' Compensation Act and the regulations covering the work being supervised. We also see this as a moral obligation and a business imperative.

Second, satisfying those obligations isn't as hard as it seems. Pretty much everything you need to know is spelled out in WorkSafeBC regulations. They're the guts of the Council's supervisor training. That emphasis surprises people, but only until they see how it lets them take a regulatory requirement and make it work on the ground. We teach you to pinpoint regulations relating specifically to your work. Think of it as translating regulatory theory into real-world practice.

For instance, our basic course shows all forest supervisors, in practical terms, how to satisfy the requirement to make regular inspections "of all workplaces, including buildings, structures, grounds, excavations, tools, equipment, machinery and work methods and practices, at intervals that will prevent the development of unsafe working conditions."

Here's an example for faller supervisors. You face the requirement of "ensuring the faller's well-being at least every 30 minutes"; we give you practical ways of conducting individual faller man-checks across often widely spread falling sites. This is useful, potentially life-saving information — at the very least, a starting point for getting clarification. You're always better off asking a hypothetical "how to" question than you are explaining "what happened" after an injury. We don't know anyone who can argue with that.

Steve Mueller is the director and Bill Bolton is the senior advisor of worker development for the BC Forest Safety Council. Information on their work, the SAFE Companies program and other Council initiatives is at <www.bcforestsafe.org>.



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