

## The Boss is Always Right

**Well, maybe not, but thanks to a new supervisor training course in BC, at least the boss will know the facts of life when it comes to worker safety.**

By Steve Mueller and Bill Bolton

A few years ago, forestry safety in BC was in such dire straits that the provincial government created a unique task force to diagnose the problem and prescribe remedies to make our working woods safer and healthier places to earn a living.

Meeting its mandate in 2004, the Forest Safety Task Force delivered farreaching recommendations meant to reverse our historically high fatality and injury rates — in the process, gaining unanimous endorsement from representatives of industry, workers and WorkSafeBC (formerly the Workers' Compensation Board of BC).

Among the key recommendations were crucial ones surrounding a serious lack of effective supervision everywhere in the working woods. The issue was undeniable, and it remains serious, surfacing again twice last year.

Nearly 1,200 experienced, certified fallers in a 2006 BC Forest Safety Council survey identified supervisor training as a top forest safety need. At about the same time, WorkSafeBC inspections of 300 forestry work sites found 25% had no designated supervisors at all, while 67% of the supervisors who were present weren't properly trained to oversee the work they were responsible for.

Now that's changing. In early 2007, the BC Forest Safety Council started offering the first two in a series of courses that will grow into a comprehensive program formally certifying forest sector supervisors. This responds directly to task force recommendations in this area.

The starting point is a basic forest supervisor's course, two days of classroom instruction and one day applying those lessons in the bush. That's the foundation for a two-day specialized faller supervisor training course that is divided between class and field work. Both are offered in large centres and small communities throughout BC.

Anyone can take the basic course, which is the pre-requisite for the specialized faller supervisor training. 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 supervisor training that, along with the basic course, would lead to certification of supervisors in mechanized harvesting, log hauling, silviculture, and other specialties.

The bottom line on the Council's supervisor training is that it pays off for everyone, by:

- Helping employers demonstrate due diligence and satisfy requirements for the SAFE Companies program that's becoming a minimum standard for forest operations in BC.
- Preparing individual supervisors to meet their own legal obligations, and be more valuable employees.
- Assuring forest workers of able supervision that gives them a better chance of going home in one piece.

Our training does that by focusing on skills and knowledge that supervisors must have to function effectively and protect workers. What would be “nice to know” isn’t part of our training — not only because that would mean producing a college course, but also because staying safe needn’t be complicated.

We start with two simple facts. First, that supervisors are legally obligated to ensure their workers’ safety and to know the BC Workers’ Compensation Act and the regulations that cover the work being supervised. Given the human and financial costs of injuries, we also see this as a moral obligation and a business imperative. Second, that satisfying those obligations isn’t as hard as it seems. Pretty much everything you need to know is spelled out in WorkSafeBC forest safety 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. The regulation should work for us, not the other way around, but supervisors need to know how to use it. Too many don’t.

The Safety Council offers a kind of guided tour, teaching supervisors to pinpoint regulations relating specifically to their work. Think of it as translating what looks like regulatory theory into real-world practice. For instance, the 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 another example for faller supervisors, who face the broad requirement of “ensuring the faller’s well-being at least every 30 minutes.” The training gives practical ways of conducting individual faller man-checks across often widely spread falling sites.

Information like this is potentially life saving, and at the very least is 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 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](http://www.bcforestsafe.org).