

Safety

Photo courtesy BC Forest Safety Council



SUPERVISOR EDUCATION: Bill Bolton (R) monitors supervisor trainee Noel Phillips as he conducts a stump audit.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Addressing forestry safety

The BC Forest Safety Council now provides supervisor training

by **STEVE MUELLER**
and **BILL BOLTON**

For years, everyone in British Columbia's forest sector agreed that its historically high fatality and injury rates must be reversed, but consensus on how to do that was hard to come by—until 2004 and the provincial government's Forest Safety Task Force.

The task force and its far-reaching recommendations broke the logjam by gaining unanimous endorsement from representatives of industry, workers and WorkSafeBC.

Today, voices like those guide the BC Forest Safety Council, created in late 2004 to work on key task force recommenda-

tions—including crucial ones surrounding a serious lack of effective supervision everywhere in the working woods.

The issue is undeniable, and last year it surfaced twice again. In a BC Forest Safety Council survey, nearly 1,200 experienced, certified B.C. fallers identified supervisor training as a top safety need. As well, WorkSafeBC inspections of 300 forestry work sites found one-fourth with no designated supervisors at all, while of those, two-thirds of the supervisors who were present weren't properly trained to oversee the work they were responsible for.

A course of action

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.

First is the basic forest supervisor's course: two days of classroom instruction and one day of applying those lessons in the bush. This is the foundation for two days of specialized faller supervisor training divided between class and field work. Both are offered in large centres and small communities throughout the province.

Anyone can take the basic course, which is the prerequisite for the specialized faller supervisor training. Later in 2007, the council plans to offer those completing both courses the opportunity to become certified faller supervisors after further council evaluation.

By the end of 2008, the BC Forest Safety Council hopes to be running other specialized supervisor training that, with the basic course, would lead to certification of supervisors in mechanized harvesting, log hauling and silviculture.

All this builds on what supervisors must have to function effectively and protect workers. Material that would simply be "nice to know" isn't part of this training—not only because that would mean producing a college course, but also because the council feels that staying safe doesn't need to be complicated.

The simple facts are that supervisors are legally obligated to ensure their workers' safety and to know the B.C. Workers' Compensation Act and the regulations that cover the work being supervised. Given the human and financial costs of injuries, the council sees this as a moral obligation and a business imperative.

Translating regulation

In British Columbia, satisfying those

obligations isn't as hard as it seems. Pretty much everything you need to know is spelled out in WorkSafeBC's 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 you, not the other way around—but you need to know how to use it. Too many people don't.

The BC Forest Safety Council offers a kind of guided tour, teaching you to pinpoint regulations relating specifically to your 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. You face the broad requirement of "ensuring the faller's well-being at least every 30 minutes"; the council's training gives you the 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.

In that sense, the council's supervisor training pays off for everyone. It helps employers demonstrate due diligence and satisfy requirements for the SAFE Companies program that's becoming a minimum standard for forest operations in B.C. Supervisors with training are more ready to meet their own legal obligations and be more valuable employees in their own right. Forest workers can count on able supervision giving them a better chance of going home in one piece. 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. For information on their work, the SAFE Companies program and other council initiatives, see www.bcforestsafes.org. **FW**

- Overnight • Personalized Early Morning Delivery
- Connecting with major Canadian & U.S. truck lines
- Convenient Vancouver freight connections

Calgary (403) 236-3282
Castlegar (250) 365-8365
Cranbrook (250) 489-5393
Lethbridge (866) 328-8643

FCL Fernie
Cartage
Ltd.

The smart way to navigate your day.



GPSMAP 276C
Colour GPS for truck, boat and car.

HUB SPORTS
33719 Essendene Ave.,
Abbotsford, BC • 604.859.8316

www.garmin.com

GARMIN