

Make SAFE Companies work for you

By Keith Playfair
BC Forest Safety Council Director

Anyone with more than a season working in B.C. forestry knows it's always challenging, always changing. Most frustrating is what we can't influence — pine beetles, roller coaster housing markets and our skyrocketing dollar.

Then there are changes that we've initiated and we control. An example is how we think about and deliver safety.

Responding to a serious need to become safer, forestry is making big changes. We're taking responsibility for the safety of our workers and worksites. Being part of this is crucial — whether you're new to forestry or, like me, have a lifetime in it.

The forestry sector created the BC Forest Safety Council to develop these necessary safety improvements, and it has the full support of industry, government and WorkSafeBC. When fully implemented, Council programs will result in profound and lasting reductions in, and ultimately the elimination of, fatalities and serious injuries.

The key to achieving that ambitious goal is the SAFE Companies program. It allows forestry companies and related enterprises to earn certification by showing that their safety programs meet realistic standards and that they have a commitment to making safety an over-riding priority.

The forestry sector intends to have every medium and large company in the program by the end of this year, with all others following no later than the end of 2008. These objectives aren't the government's or WorkSafeBC's — but come from industry, with the full support of owners and licencees.

So far, thousands of companies have registered with the program; hundreds have taken the required training and become SAFE-certified.

For the rest, it's definitely time to move forward — whether you've registered but haven't completed SAFE certification, or have put off taking the first step of signing up.

Registering brings you all the material, training and support you'll need — a step-by-step workbook to help build or review your safety program, access to free advice from a Council safety advocate and useful feedback during the audit to show your safety activities meets industry standards that are practical and doable.

Those last three words can't be overstated: practical and doable. SAFE Companies was built with advice from contractors and workers who know what happens in the real world, and they're still helping keep things on track. The program's not about jumping through hoops, or paperwork. It's about safety for forest workers.

People ask, "How hard is it? Will it make my company safer?"

First, the program requires some time and effort — documenting activities that may have been done informally before, or putting new procedures in place. But all this is necessary, and useful.

Second, I know that SAFE-certified companies enjoy definite pay-offs. The most important one is obvious — a safety program you know protects your workers. But here are some not-so-obvious benefits I've heard about:

- In one case, SAFE Companies led a contractor to look closer at the fundamentals of his business, "the entire operation...managing fuel and people and every detail." The results were operational improvements that he knows paid off.
- Another contractor found employees paying more attention to their jobs as they became more safety-conscious. One benefit was less equipment damage; it adds up when you can cut back on some of those regular \$2,000 repair bills for pick-up trucks.
- Safety meetings didn't turn into gripe sessions, as a third contractor thought they might. After dealing with safety issues, workers and the employer actually talked about the job in ways that improved productivity. Safety meetings became useful crew meetings.

Then there are paybacks you get for being part of the program:

- More and more licencees and major companies are making SAFE Certification a condition of bidding or working. Some want this now, and others in early 2008. Getting certified sooner rather than later puts you ahead of the game.
- Certification makes you eligible for annual premium rebates from WorkSafeBC. But you need to be certified by the end of 2007 for to qualify for this year's rebate.

As I see it, the only downside to SAFE Companies is holding back. If you delay, it affects your employees' safety, the health of your business and, ultimately, your ability to work in forestry.

Some companies have registered, but haven't taken the necessary next steps — despite the obvious safety benefits, rebates on this year's WorkSafeBC premiums and those early 2008 certification timelines. Waiting is a mistake.

The Council is geared up to help you become certified — with qualified program staff, effective training and solid support systems. Now is the time to take advantage of all that, to make SAFE Companies work for you.

Long a key figure in British Columbia's forest sector, Keith Playfair is a principal of the KDL Group of Companies. He was on the 2003-04 Forest Safety Task Force, serves as a BC Forest Safety Council director and is active in the Central Interior Logging Association.

For more information, contact: Karen Zukas, BC Forest Safety Council 604 696-3959



Don't let an equipment loss destroy YOU!

Talk to US...

HUB
International
Barton

HUB International
Barton Insurance

Kamloops: 800-663-5184

Prince George: 888-223-3309

Williams Lake: 877-392-6565

Visit our other BC Branches

Vanderhoof: 250-567-2231 • Dawson Creek: 250-782-5565

Chilliwack: 604-703-7070 • Revelstoke: 250-837-5237

Nakusp: 250-265-3631 • Salmon Arm: 250-832-2143 • Merritt: 250-378-5147

Kelowna: 250-765-4143 • Cranbrook: 250-426-8261