



# FOREST SAFETY OMBUDSMAN COMMENTS ON INQUEST RECOMMENDATIONS

By Roger Harris

Recently, the Forest Safety Ombudsman Office announced its intention to undertake a review of resource roads in the province of BC. A number of factors contributed to our decision. First, log truck driving is the number one occupation for people losing their lives in the forest sector. Second, the amount of vehicle traffic on resource roads across the province is continuing to increase. Finally, inquiries concerning road maintenance, regulatory jurisdiction issues, road construction specifications and cycle times make up the largest percentage of calls our office receives.

The recently completed Coroner's Inquest into Joseph Leroux's fatality looked at a number of similar issues and has made several recommendations directed at the Ministry of Forests & Range, WorkSafeBC, the BC Forest Safety Council (BCFSC) and ICBC. The recommendations brought forward are well thought out and address many of the areas that our review will be considering. Over the course of the year our office will be following closely how those recommendations are dealt with by the respective organizations and incorporating any changes into our review.

Of special interest to our office is the recommendation to ICBC to implement a forestry logging truck driver endorsement for all commercial drivers. It echoes a recommendation that came out of our first report released in January 2007 titled "Not Out of the Woods." Our report called on the BCFSC to develop a province-wide competency certification model for log truck drivers employed in the forest industry. It also recommended ICBC develop a provincial approach to a truck driving certification/endorsement model.

There are 29 different trailer configurations for logging trucks. While our paved highway system includes hills with 10% grade, it is not uncommon to find off-highway logging roads with 20-25% plus adverse. The range

of expertise required to operate the numerous configurations of vehicles in the wide variety of operating conditions is extensive and requires a unique set of skills. During the course of our review in 2006 it became abundantly clear that there was a disconnect in the industry between the level of certification/experience required to operate a loaded logging truck and the minimum level of certification/licensing required to acquire employment. It was something that was identified by licencees, contractors, log truck drivers, training institutions and many agencies that fund truck-driver training programs.

From the development of inland ports in Prince George, to expanded activity across all of the resource sectors, the demand for truck drivers is only going to grow over the next decade. A properly trained professional truck driver force is dependent on a clear identification of the range of skills required to operate specific truck units in specific applications. Developing training programs that will result in a provincially recognized level of training/expertise will not be possible without those clear endorsement requirements.

Our report recommended that the BCFSC together with ICBC develop a certification/endorsement system that looks at the full range of vehicles and trailer configurations that can be operated under a Class 1 license. The user groups of the resource roads in the province goes well beyond forestry to include mining, gas, oil, tourism, agriculture and general freight cargo to name a few. For some communities, especially First Nations, resource roads are the only access to the publicly paved highway system. It is for that reason our office believes an endorsement system must go beyond the forest sector to include the entire trucking industry to be effective.

The Coroner's investigation, like our report, focused on how we make the resource roads in our province safer to drive for everyone, whether as a member of the workforce

or as the general public. I would like to commend the Coroner's office for bringing this recommendation forward and would again urge ICBC to consider the views that have been raised, take the lead and move forward on this issue.

Time is not our friend. ■

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