

Focus on Safety

by Ron Gorman

It's Definitely Better Safe Than Sorry



I learned a valuable lesson as a young man, when a fire completely destroyed our company's sawmill, devastating our family business. But in the costly process of rebuilding, we diversified and modernized, and this led to positive long-term outcomes. We later grew in ways that probably wouldn't have been possible before the fire.

Today, three decades later, parallel events seem to be at work in BC's forestry sector - including its vital silviculture operations.

It's an understatement to say that we delivered a sorry safety performance for much of the twentieth century. In 2004, a provincial government task force documented deep-seated problems in a comprehensive report recommending far-reaching changes. They required serious investment by industry and major efforts by other players. But recognizing the need, everyone signed on: licensees, companies of all kinds and sizes, labour, the BC government and its forestry and safety agencies.

The industry took responsibility for improving safety. Collectively, we said, "This is unacceptable. This is our problem, and we're going to fix it." That's exactly what we did, individually and collectively. Since 2004, companies of all sizes and kinds have paid more attention to how we treat and

practice safety. As an industry, we adopted the BC Forest Safety Accord, and formed the BC Forest Safety Council, using it to launch diverse programs that will, over time, fundamentally create a new safety culture.

From the get-go, we understood that this would be a long-term commitment. Attitudes don't change overnight, and programs take time to implement. It's very satisfying, then, to have a newly-released statistical analysis show that our efforts are starting to pay off in a big way.

On top of a steep year-to-year decline in fatalities, BC forestry in 2006 recorded reductions of 21.5% in injuries and 39.0% in injury costs.

These unprecedented one-year improvements involved major progress by silviculture:

- 6.5% fewer compensation claims - with 22.1 fewer claims by young workers, a major segment of silviculture employees
- 30.1% fewer days lost from work overall

The crucial benefits are fewer personal lives disrupted by injuries and higher morale, thanks to the forest sector's clear commitment to the safety of its workers and workplaces.

Changing attitudes in a large, diverse industry takes patience and hard work. Our forest sector has made a good start through the BC Forest Safety Council, with its training

and certification programs for individual workers like manual tree fallers, and a SAFE Companies program that will ultimately certify all forestry operations as meeting and exceeding required safety standards. Complementing these programs are efforts by other players, including the government and WorkSafeBC, also taking positive actions to improve forestry safety.

Ultimately, however, it will be the cumulative effects of individual decisions and actions by individuals and companies that keep our businesses safe.

Maintaining our momentum won't be easy, as we're experiencing a difficult period in our history. But tough times should help us focus on what's critical to the long-term success of forestry in BC.

Our future depends on improved workplace safety, and safety investments today will pay dividends in a healthier industry tomorrow, one that is more dynamic, efficient and innovative - and able to assure workers and their families that earning a living doesn't come at the price of life and limb. That's a must for all forestry jobs, from falling to tree planting.

Co-chair of the BC Forest Safety Council director, Ron Gorman is chief executive officer of Gorman Bros. Lumber Ltd. Harvesting and milling timber in the Okanagan Valley, the 56 year-old family company is grooming its third generation of working owners.

The future is in our hands...

**GROWERS OF CONIFERS,
DECIDUOUS &
WILDLIFE SHRUBS**

To order your **FREE**
catalogue or to place
an order:

T: 866-640-8733
F: 519-586-9118
www.forestcare.com

ForestCare
Growing today for a greener tomorrow

**CONE
COLLECTING**

ALL SPECIES

- Complete turnkey operation
- Capable of large bulk collections
- Inquire about our Patented on-site seed collection process
- New innovative technology redefines the seed/cone collecting process

SILVATECH DEVELOPMENT INC.
780-778-3674