



MEETING FORESTRY'S SAFETY CHALLENGES

by Keith Playfair

Silviculture is vital to forestry, shares its fundamental safety challenges, and from what I see, takes a leadership role in tackling them.

BC's forestry sector is assuming responsibility for safety through the BC Forest Safety Council, whose goal is to eliminate fatalities and serious injuries. Created with support from industry and government, it has a designated seat on the provincial board for the Western Silvicultural Contractors' Association.

Central to the Council's basic goal is its SAFE Companies program. This allows companies to earn certification by showing that their safety program meets realistic standards. The plan is to have every BC forestry operation in the program by the end of 2008 - an objective endorsed by owners and licencees.

So far, thousands of companies have registered and hundreds have taken the training and become SAFE-certified. This is the time to act, whether you've signed up but haven't completed SAFE certification, or haven't registered yet.

Registration brings you important support: a step-by-step workbook to help build or review safety programs; access to free advice from Council safety advocates; and feedback on how to show your safety activities meet industry standards.

It's all practical and doable because SAFE Companies was built with input from contractors and workers who know what happens in the real world. The program is not about jumping through hoops. It's about worker safety.

A few may question the need for the SAFE Companies program because they have good safety records, but is past history a guarantee of future good performance? Others ask, "How hard is it? Will it make my company safer?"

First, the program requires some effort - documenting what may have been done informally before, or putting new procedures in place. But it's necessary, and useful.

Second, SAFE-certified companies enjoy definite payoffs. The most important is obvious - a safety program that protects your workers. Here are others:

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

Everyone can also count on these benefits:

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

That's good news for individual operators, but also for forestry as a whole. Ultimately, safety is about what we do, and our well-being as an industry.

Forestry must act and be accountable for safety collectively. SAFE Companies makes that possible. The only downside is avoiding it. This affects your employees' safety and the health of your business.

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.

A key figure in BC's forest sector, Keith Playfair is a principal of the KDL Group of Companies. He serves as a BC Forest Safety Council director, is active in the Central Interior Logging Association and was on the BC government's 2003-04 Forest Safety Task Force. More information on SAFE Companies is at www.bcforestsafe.org.

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