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MAKING THE CUT: The minimum employment requirements for drivers often fall short of what is actually required to safely operate a loaded logging truck.

Reducing risk on resource roads

We need to take action and put safety in the driver's seat

by **ROGER HARRIS**

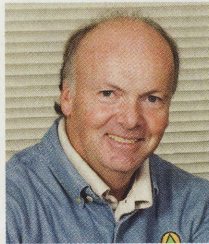


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Roger Harris

City drivers dealing with tough driving and heavy traffic might want to think about people like 52-year-old Joseph Leroux—who died after his loaded logging truck met an empty one on a backcountry road 190 kilometres north of Prince George. The case was unusual, not because of the circumstances but because it led to a coroner's inquest in 2007—believed to be the first into a logging truck fatality in northern B.C. The coroner's jury produced recommendations to the BC Forest Safety Council, ICBC, the Ministry of Forests and Range, and WorkSafeBC.

Early this year, B.C. Auditor General John Doyle issued a comprehensive report on safety in forestry, and the report also di-

rected attention to roads like the one on which Leroux died.

I had covered similar ground six months before the Leroux inquest with a report on forestry safety recommending, among other things, that the BC Forest Safety Council develop a system to certify logging truck drivers and that ICBC introduce a related Class 1 licence endorsement.

I had received input on resource road problems from contractors, logging truck drivers, training institutions and others. They agreed that minimum employment requirements for drivers often fall short of what's actually required to operate loaded logging trucks.

This February, I released a separate report focusing on resource roads. It went beyond forestry because these roads serve other industries, including mining, gas, oil, tourism and more. As well, resource roads may be the only access to the public highway system for some communities.

The broader input led me to make 17 rec-

ommendations. Of all my proposals, three are critical.

Through the Ministry of Forests and Range, the B.C. government should establish regional road safety management groups to oversee effective problem-solving for specific resource roads.

The Province should also designate resource roads as public highways where they serve as primary or secondary access routes to communities.

The BC Forest Safety Council should take the lead in developing an industrial drivers' certification program that includes the full range of commercial vehicles and trailer configurations on resource roads, no matter what their industry. I also propose adding training for drivers of light vehicles such as pickup trucks, ATVs and four-wheel-drive vehicles. All resource road users must be trained for this environment that is much more hazardous than public highways.

The demand for better resource road management can only grow, given factors ranging from the development of inland ports in Prince George to steadily expanding activity in all industries.

We must meet that demand. The Leroux inquest saw this clearly; the auditor general marked the need, and it was confirmed by contributors to both of my reports.

Everyone agrees that action is needed now because time is not our friend; it is a deadly enemy of all the men and women who drive B.C.'s resource roads every day. We must make sure that none of them becomes the subject of a coroner's inquest. **KB**

Roger Harris is the BC Forest Safety Ombudsman. More information on Harris's office and the full text of his first two reports can be found at www.bcforestsafesafe.org/nav-ombud.html.

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