YOUR SOURCE FOR WORKER DEVELOPMENT INFORMATION

Forest Worker Development bulletin

January 2009

2008 in Review – Faller Supervisor Alert

In 2006 and 2007, Certified Fallers in BC went a record 28 months with no fatalities. This was the result of the hard work, attention to detail, and good falling practices put in place by fallers and supervisors every day around the province.

But in 2008, EIGHT men died on the job (as indicated on the WorkSafeBC Notice of Incidents). Seven of them were experienced certified fallers, with the skills, knowledge and ability to fall safely.

Each of these fallers also had a supervisor. Someone who will never forget the day one of their fallers died, and will always wonder if they could have done anything to avoid this worst-case outcome.

We don't know all of the factors that led to each of these fatalities. But now is the time to consider what you can do to make yourself and your crew more committed to getting and staying on the right side of the many hazards that you face each day.

What happened?

Four of these fatalities were caused by danger trees left standing. Three were caused by trees that had been, or were being, bucked. In some cases the basic rules of falling were ignored – being within two tree lengths of another faller; working below a bucked tree, or lack of an escape route.

And these weren't rookies. These certified fallers all had between 6 and 30 years of falling experience. But the result was the same for all these men - some incredibly experienced fallers wound up dead.

In addition to the Notice of Incidents received from WorkSafeBC, there were 2 additional falling fatalities reported in 2008. At the beginning of 2008, a landowner with no falling experience died while attempting to fall a tree on his own property. At the end of 2008, a certified faller suffered an apparent heart attack while falling.

Supervisor Alert!

Don't let these deaths go by without taking action. We won't have a good idea of all the factors that contributed to these fatalities until WorkSafeBC and other investigations are

complete. That can take months or years. You and your fallers can't wait that long – maybe making some of the same errors along the way.

What Should <u>You</u> Do?

First – Talk to your crew now. Fallers don't always know how many fatalities have happened or hear any details about what went wrong. Get everything out in the open.

Emphasize that fatalities and serious injuries CAN be prevented. 2006 and 2007 were proof that fallers can dramatically change their own safety outcomes.

Don't assume that you know all the details about what happened. Focus on what you do know and what you can do about it. We've included a "*Supervisor Step-by-Step"* safety meeting outline to this bulletin. You can use all or part of it at your next safety meeting.

Second – Take a close look at yourself. Supervisors have many responsibilities on a job site: planning, production, quality, reporting and more. It's easy to lose sight of the fact that NOTHING is more important than getting your men home safe at the end of the day.

- Do you do good site assessments before you send fallers in? Do you walk the block? Would you delay the start of work to deal with a hazard or would you just let it go? Think about it.

- Do you evaluate the faller, or evaluate the stump? Stumps can tell you something about how the faller made their cuts. But watching the faller can tell you how safely he is working or whether he is ignoring hazards in order to lay the wood down faster. Look to see if a pattern of poor habits is developing.

- Do you step in and coach your fallers when you see sloppy workmanship? Everyone can drift into bad habits at work. For most people their bad habits won't kill or disable them. Falling is different. Watching the faller work, looking at his work practises, encouraging good habits and pointing out better techniques is critical. You have the skills, authority and responsibility to do that.

- Are you being tough when you need to be? When fallers commit one of the deadly sins of falling, it doesn't just put them at risk. It risks their co-workers on site, it risks a fine or worse from WorkSafeBC, and it risks your reputation as a supervisor running a safe operation. This is the time to drive home the message that some actions are never OK and will never be allowed on your site. It's ultimately your main responsibility as a faller supervisor. You will sleep better at night for it, your crew will respect your clarity, and overall safety will improve.

<u>Conclusion</u>

One fatality is too many. Eight is a disaster. The falling community proved through 2006 and 2007 that when everyone paid attention, fatalities could be prevented. There were no fewer hazards in those years. The production pressure was always there. But attention was paid and it paid off, big time.

Let's get back on track in 2009. You can make the difference.

Supervisor Step-by-Step Safety Meeting

Supervisors can make the difference between fallers hearing about a fatality and thinking “It’ll never happen to me” instead of thinking “What can I do to avoid that ever happening to me?”

Use the fatalities in 2008 to take some positive steps for yourself and your falling crew.

Step One

Look at the fatalities from 2008. We’ve attached a list of the initial information from each incident. These aren’t complete or final investigation results, but most fallers will be able to identify with at least one of the scenarios. Pick one that seems similar to your operation, or where you’ve seen your fallers do a similar thing. Or discuss them all.

Go over the incident(s) with your crew. Use the basic descriptions we’ve given you, and then talk with your crew about how you’ve seen similar things happen on your site. Or ask them what they’ve seen. For example, ask them “When is it OK to be below a bucked off rootwad?” See what your crew says. The right answer here is “never.” Several fallers have died being crushed in exactly this situation.

Ask more questions: What was the right thing to do here? How could this incident have been prevented? What do we need to be doing differently?

Step Two

Pick a day and tell your crew that you’re not going to be checking stumps, you’re going to focus on how they recognize and deal with hazards. Then do it. Watch them work.

This is a chance for coaching on a factor that can mean the difference between life and death for fallers every day. Don’t yell and scream if you find a hazard they’ve missed:

- See if they can identify the hazard given a second chance;
- Once they recognise it, make sure they know how to deal with it (and that they do);
- Let them know they’ve got your support in refusing to put themselves at risk;
- Most importantly, lead by example. If you let hazards go without corrective actions, what message are you sending to your fallers?

Step Three

Give credit to your fallers who are working safely, identifying hazards and practicing good work habits. It’s not always easy, but in the long run people respond better to praise than punishment, even though correction is sometimes necessary.

Faller Fatalities – Information distilled from WorkSafeBC Initial Notices of Incident

	Date of Incident	Time	Region	Worker Experience	Description of Incident
1	January 22, 2008	10:00	Campbell River	15 years	A cedar windfall that was being bucked by a certified faller pivoted, pinning the faller up against a rock bluff.
2	February 12, 2008	11:00	Gold River	14 years	A certified faller was struck by the top of a danger tree (138' tall) that was felled by the worker's falling partner.
3	April 17, 2008	13:00	Lake Cowichan	30 years	A certified faller was clearing around the base of a small hemlock to fall the tree. Previously bucked cedar/hemlock trees with an attached rootwad system slid down the steep hillside and pinned the faller.
4	May 9, 2008	16:00	Cultus Lake	10 years	A certified faller was bucking a slightly elevated windfall tree that was lying straight downhill on a 70% side hill. It let go striking the worker as it slid past.
5	July 14, 2008	16:00	Campbell River	2 years	A worker was clearing an area in front of a viewing platform. The worker attempted to fall an 85' tall, 16" alder tree, which was leaning approximately 20 degrees down hill. The tree "barber chaired" to a height of 18' and the butt of the tree struck the worker.
6	July 21, 2008	13:30	Sparwood	32 years	A certified faller on a lunch break was struck by a runaway log (danger tree) that came out of the forest above the faller.
7	August 21, 2008	07:30	Bella Bella	6 years	A certified faller felled two green trees by pushing to overcome a falling difficulty. From uphill a 40' tall danger tree struck the faller.
8	Oct. 7, 2008	15:50	Bella Bella	35 years	A certified faller was struck by the top part of a 91' tall danger tree. The top 38' broke off its stem. The danger tree was located above the faller, 45' inside the standing timber.

BC **Forest Safety** Council
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