

BC Forest Safety Ombudsman

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BC **Forest Safety** Council

A sober reflection:

This is the fifth annual report of the BC Forest Safety (BCFSC) Ombudsman. This report will again highlight the activities of our office over 2011 as well as provide some comments to the public, forest industry and the BCFSC on issues that our office believes still requires attention or should become re-prioritized in 2012.

Our office has titled this report “A Sober Reflection.” In our previous reports, I have commented on the continued success the forest sector has achieved in improving safety outcomes for workers and the public, and every member of the BCFSC, as well as groups outside the industry who have participated in achieving these goals should be commended on those successes.

However, while overall safety statistics have improved, there has been an increase in fatalities in the industry from five deaths in 2009, to eight deaths in 2011. Any increase in the number of fatalities is unacceptable

and provides the constant reminder that as an industry, no company, association or individual can take a moment off in the effort to improve the safety culture and environment in the workplace. The increase in fatalities, while not the definitive measure of overall safety performance, is a trend that our office believes cannot be ignored.

The year 2011 was marked by this office undertaking a review of the “Khaira situation”, a situation where - despite all of the evidence that appears to have existed and been documented by the various regulatory bodies against Khaira leading up to the incident in Golden - we had a workplace contracted by the government deteriorate to the point where workers had to be rescued. This situation, which was so clearly intolerable on many levels, failed not only the Khaira workers, but also all British Columbians who rely on government to maintain a certain level of safety in the workplace.

The Khaira review “IF A TREE FALLS IN THE WOODS AND NO ONE IS AROUND TO HEAR IT...” is a reminder that in spite of all of the efforts, resources, and commitments of people working in and for the forest sector to improve the safety environment for everyone, things can still sometimes go very wrong in the workplace.

While the Khaira review received the greatest attention in 2011, our office has been engaged and responded to other enquiries in a number of specific industry initiatives and participated in a variety of public outreach events.

This report “Sober Reflection” is intended to highlight the importance

of ensuring that we do not become complacent in our efforts toward safety because – as the increase in workplace fatalities and the Khaira situation demonstrates – there are still improvements to make in order to ensure that the workplace is safe for everyone.



ROGER HARRIS
FOREST SAFETY OMBUDSMAN

Outstanding Issues

Each year our office has provided a list of the outstanding issues that have been raised either through a specific report or as a result of an enquiry to the Safety Ombudsman office. Many of these issues continue to surface year to year with some only realizing limited progress. Our Reviews: “Not Out of the Woods (2007), No Longer the Road Less Travelled (2008) and The Safe Companies Report (2009), all still have outstanding recommendations that our office believes can contribute to improving safety outcomes for workers and their families.

As part of the 2012 BC Forest Safety Ombudsman work plan, we will focus on reviewing previous recommendations to ensure they are still relevant today and will also provide a report to the industry and public on the progress that is being made.

OUTSTANDING ISSUES FROM LAST YEAR INCLUDE:

FALLER CERTIFICATION:

There has been some significant progress made in dealing with the Faller Certification, Training and Supervision through the work of the Faller Training Advisory Committee. There continues to be an outstanding issue with the Ministry of Forest Lands Natural Resource Operation, (MFLNRO), Fire Fighting Crew faller training and certification and how it fits into the existing certification system.

MINISTRY OF FOREST LANDS NATURAL RESOURCE OPERATIONS:

There are still individuals harvesting logs and undertaking other work for MFLNRO in the province of BC who are not required by the MFLNRO to be SAFE Certified Companies. Our office continues to be of the view that until all harvesting of logs, whether under government contracts or in the private

sector, are required to be undertaken by a SAFE Certified company, the credibility of the SAFE Companies Program is at risk.

CYCLE TIME:

The number of formal enquiries to our office concerning cycle times has declined over the last five years. Our office is of the view that much of this might be due to an improvement in the communication between the trucking sector and mill yard operators. There are still some informal enquiries that have been raised by industry associations regarding cycle times, and this along with the lack of a formal industry wide process for managing this issue, our office will prioritize to review the cycle times in 2012.

RESOURCE ROADS:

This is the area where the general public has been most engaged with the BC Forest Safety Ombudsman office. There has been progress made by the province in introducing a process to receive stakeholder input to assist in the development of a Resource Road Act. Our office commends and supports the efforts by government in engaging the public as they seek to find solutions for a very complex issue. Our office will continue to monitor these activities in 2012.

Enquiries

This annual review covers a shortened timeline, even though the overall trend of enquiries continues to decline. Our office believes the continued efforts of the BCFSC to engage stakeholder groups and the work of individual associations in promoting a more open dialogue on safety issues in the workplace are all contributing factors in the decline of enquiries.

The numbers below reflect the actual number of contacts to our office about the respective issues, in some cases a single contact may actual represent a larger group of individuals or an organization.

SUMMARY OF INQUIRIES	
TOPIC	INQUIRIES
Safe Companies	2
Fallers Issues	4
Resource Roads	2
Trucking	1
Worker Safety	1
Total:	10



Outreach

- > In 2011, our Office continued to promote the activities of the BC Forest Safety Ombudsman and the forest industry through participation in a number of forest stakeholder and public events, including:
 - o Truck Loggers Association Convention (AGM)
 - o Prince George Northern Resources Forum, Interior Loggers Association AGM
 - o Union of BC Municipalities AGM
 - o COFI Convention and
 - o Northern Local Government Association AGM

2012 will continue to see our office participate in a variety of Association AGMs, conventions, as well as a number of local government and industry trade association events. Raising public and industry awareness of forest safety issues will continue to be a priority for our office.

As well, our office participated in the Faller Technical Advisory Committee sessions with its work to develop standards for Faller Training and Supervision.

2012:

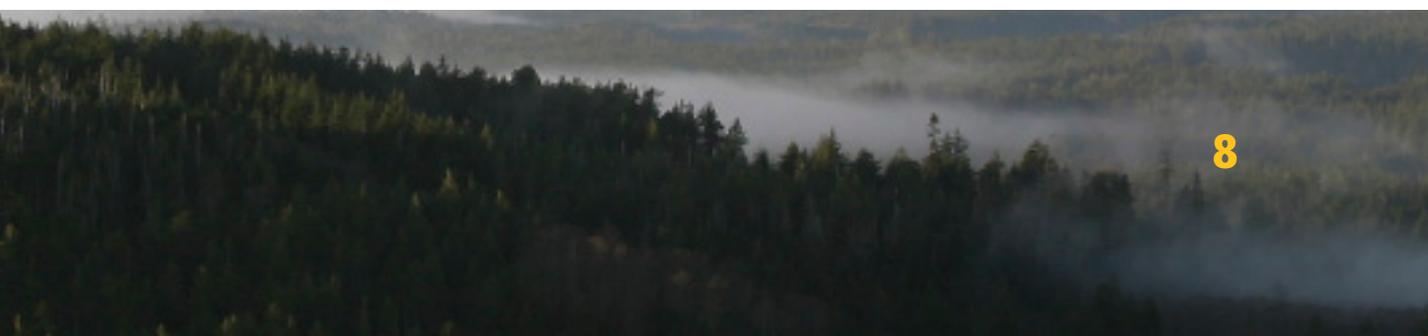
Over the last few years the forest industry has been experiencing significant change - economic, technological, social, environmental and cultural. As well, there are some indicators that much of the initial work of the BCFSC, which has borne significant positive results in improving safety for workers and the public, may be plateauing. Our 2010/2011 Annual Review raised a number questions and issues that our office felt were core to the forest sector continuing to move forward. How the industry and BCFSC ultimately responds to the challenges and issues will define both the relevance of the BCFSC going forward and its ability to continually improve the safety outcomes for the workers, families and the public that interact with the forest industry.

Changing times require that organizations are equally able to adjust and adapt. Our office is of the view it is time for the BCFSC to consider how it wants to proceed, so that it can help the industry adapt to the provincial, national and global changes.

For 2012, the BC Forest Safety Ombudsman office will continue to focus on supporting the efforts of all groups in promoting and achieving improvement in workplace safety. Our office will undertake a review of our reports on Resource Roads, Training/Certification, and Safe Companies to ensure that the recommendations contained in those reports are still relevant in a changing forest industry landscape, and we will follow up on our current list of “Outstanding Issues” to monitor the progress that is being made and provide feedback on efforts by various organizations, associations and government.

For 2012 our office will also be tracking the recommendations that flowed from the Khaira review, the degree by which the conditions that endured in these camps were allowed to exist shocked our office. We will engage those organizations that participated in the review and monitor the progress of all of the relevant groups involved.

We ended the 2010/2011 Annual Review with this observation: “In the past few years all facets of the industry have changed. Change and adaptation are essential for survival. For the industry and BCFSC the question is: will the need for change be seen as a threat or an opportunity? Their answer will determine the Path Forward”. Our office believes that the forest industry is ready to adapt and change to challenges, and now it is important to take stock of what has been accomplished and what still needs improvement. The focus of the BC Forest Safety Ombudsman Office in 2012 will therefore be to take a “Sober Reflection” of our successes as an industry in workplace safety.





BC Forest Safety Council

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ABOUT THE OMBUDSMAN OFFICE

The Office of the Forest Safety Ombudsman enhances safety in the BC forest sector by becoming a safe, confidential and persuasive agent for the raising and review of safety concerns throughout the sector and facilitating impartial and timely resolution of safety issues.

The Forest Safety Ombudsman is part of the BC Forest Safety Council and has a clear mandate to investigate safety issues and recommend the best means to address them. The Ombudsman uses review, recommendation, mediation and conciliation where necessary and also relies on international experience and leading examples of success to inform the process.

ABOUT THE BC FOREST SAFETY COUNCIL

The BC Forest Safety Council works with forestry employers, workers, contractors and the government to make BC's forests safer. It is a not-for-profit society consisting of forestry organizations and supported by WorkSafeBC and the provincial government.

ABOUT THE OMBUDSMAN, ROGER HARRIS

BC's first Forest Safety Ombudsman is Roger Harris, who was appointed in 2006. Harris has been actively involved in the forest industry since he was 19 and has experience in many areas of the forest sector. He has worked as a dishwasher in a logging camp, been a board member for a Local of the IWA, has owned and operated his own phase logging contract business and was appointed Minister of State for Forestry Operations during his tenure as a MLA.

Harris knows firsthand the importance of safety and the impact that injuries and fatalities can have on workers and their families. In 1986 while working as a falling contractor, his right hand was nearly severed when his chainsaw kicked back. His brother-in-law was killed in a forestry accident at age 18.