

PILOT PROJECT PLAN TO GET PEOPLE BACK TO WORK QUICKER AND REDUCE INSURANCE RATES

The Truck Loggers Association, WorkSafeBC and the BC Forest Safety Council (BCFSC) have come together on a new initiative to get forestry workers back to work quicker and reduce industry's WorkSafeBC rates.

Currently, the average BC worker returns to work 60 days after being injured and the average forestry worker returns to work 108 days after being injured. This pilot program will help us close that gap.

One Team, One Service

This pilot project will see all coastal forestry claims being handled through a Nanaimo-based injury claims team. These dedicated case managers with expertise in coastal forestry trades and knowledge in effective disability management techniques will be on hand to help injured workers throughout their return-to-work experience.

"In the pilot, workers injured at coastal logging operations will be served by the Nanaimo centre. The staff there represents a single point of contact for injured workers and their employers," says Laurie Inrig, WorkSafeBC manager of client services. "The partnership will ensure injured workers get the best of medical care in an expedited way and have everything in place to recover and to get back to work as quickly as possible."

The TLA has already started working with this WorkSafeBC team. We took nine WorkSafeBC employees out to see a logging show and a road building show outside of Nanaimo so they could get an idea of what a day working in the logging industry really looks like.

Taking Ownership of Form 7

Before a claim can be opened, WorkSafeBC has to receive three items: form 6 (the form the injured worker completes), form 11 (the form the doctor completes) and form 7 (the form the employer completes). Across BC, it takes an average of seven days for the

employer to submit the form. Within the forestry sector, it takes an average of 21 days.

"WorkSafeBC can't address a file if they do not have the paperwork," said Dwight Yochim, Executive Director for the TLA. "The first savings can come directly from our own efforts to file the form 7 quicker. If we can reduce the delay by 14 days, the average time it takes for medical information to get to WorkSafeBC, we are directly influencing a worker's quicker return to work. The quicker the paperwork is submitted, the quicker WorkSafeBC can seek medical intervention for the injured worker."

To help forestry employers achieve this goal, BC Forest Safety Council is creating a program, starting January 2, 2014, where employers or employees can call a confidential toll-free hotline (1-855-234-8360) to ask questions, find the right form and receive other information to help speed up the process. "When we help to fast-track the form process, we get people back to work faster, saving everyone a great deal of time, money and frustration," said Rob Moonen, the BCFSC's Director of SAFE Companies.

Getting Back in the Saddle Quicker

In addition to educating employers about improving claims processing, the pilot will also focus on timely and early return-to-work following an injury. Research shows that the longer people stay away from work, the less likely they are to return at all. Getting back after an injury also helps people stay physically and mentally active and reduces the risk of chronic pain. Even if they're doing modified duties, people benefit from the support networks and social contact that work provides.

Working with industry, a key goal of this initiative is to educate employers about these benefits of providing modified duties when a worker is recovering

from injury. "One of the most important things injured workers can do is keep working or return to work, but modified duties in the forestry industry vary considerably from firm to firm," says Inrig. "If a school gym teacher were injured, for example, they may be able to mark exams or do administration or prep work as a modified job. But for the forestry industry, the opportunities are not as obvious."

"On a logging or road construction jobsite there is no such thing as light or modified duties," said Yochim. "However, if you're a larger contractor or company you may have other options available to you."

The Business Case

There's also a strong business case to be made for effective return-to-work programs. "The longer people stay off work, the more it costs," Inrig says. "Insurance premiums go up, and the forestry industry already has high rates."

Forestry is a risky industry and injury rates are high. For every 100 workers, five in forestry were injured in 2012, compared to 2.3 across all other sectors in BC combined. The most common injuries are strains and sprains, and fractures.

In addition to premiums paid to WorkSafeBC, indirect costs of injuries and poorly understood disability management practices are significant. Those costs include lost productivity, rehiring, training, and overtime.

Looking Forward

"After two years, we will have real measurable results from this work," said Yochim, "This will show us if the pilot has made a difference in workers' health and industry rates."

If the pilot project is as effective as organizers are hoping, the model will be rolled out in the forestry industry throughout the province. ♣