



*BC Forest Safety Ombudsman
Annual Review 2016*



BC Forest Safety

Safety is **good** business

This is the 10th Annual Review of the BC Forest Safety Ombudsman.

The Review is organized into:

- ◆ general observations regarding the current role of the BC Forest Safety Council (BCFSC) and the Ombudsman's Office
- ◆ summary of activities in 2016-early 2017, and highlights of some outstanding issues and
- ◆ priorities for 2017.

General observations

Over the past decade, the number of accidents in the forestry sector has decreased substantially.

At the same time, statistics show that the severity of accidents – as well as the number of fatalities from accidents – is no longer decreasing but has in fact plateaued and flattened out. The forest industry is still one of the most dangerous places to work in Canada.

In order to improve conditions for forestry workers and reduce accidents and fatalities further, the BCFSC should regularly review its strategies to ensure it remains effective.

There are three positive trends that our Office has observed over the past year that may assist the BCFSC in finding those new strategies. These trends are:

- ◆ The increasing role of the public in ensuring forestry safety.

- ◆ The cultural shift in the forestry sector
- ◆ The reduction in the “code of silence”.

Role of the public

When the Ombudsman's Office was established in 2006, it was accessed extensively by stakeholders in the industry who needed help resolving specific challenges and disputes between various forest sector participants. Where resolution wasn't possible, the Office utilized provincial reviews as a tool to raise industry-wide issues and provide recommendations to various agencies, organizations, and governments.

These provincial reviews have progressively highlighted the role that the public – and public interests – play in ensuring a safe forestry industry.

For example, our first review in 2006 titled “Not Out of the Woods”, focused on training and certification issues related exclusively to licensees, regulators, contractors, owner-operators, employees, and associations in the BC forest sector. By 2008, our review introduced the concept of the interface between the forestry sector and the general public – “No Longer the Road Less Travelled” reflected the reality that a number of logging camps had become communities and that forestry resource roads were in effect highways that connected people living in those communities to public services such as healthcare and education.

Finally, our 2017 provincial review titled “Will It Be There?” is a review of Helicopter Emergency Medical

Services (HEMS) in BC and is as applicable to rural governments and people living in rural communities as it is to the forestry sector. The 2017 report is an example of how the BCFSC and Ombudsman's Office has changed over the last decade – while the report is focused on the transportation of injured workers from an initial accident scene to the first level of higher medical care, it is clear that the health and safety of forestry workers is intimately related to the safety and health of their families and the communities in which they reside.

Given that the forest sector remains an industry that has a fatality and severity rate that is still disproportionately high when compared to other industry sectors, the Ombudsman's Office has always believed that the role and interest of the general public in the forest sector is positive – it reminds the industry that it is part of a larger community, and one that is demanding higher standards of safety.

Cultural change

In 2006, the single greatest challenge facing BCFSC was shifting the industry from a culture where logging jobs were perceived as inherently dangerous and accidents/fatalities inevitable and accepted (simply a “cost of doing business”), to a culture of professionalism where accidents were neither inevitable nor acceptable.

From the tone and topics of exchanges that occurred in the early days of the BCFSC, to the substance of the conversations and dialogue in 2017 – both in board rooms and the

Now, the question is: where to next?

workplace – it is clear that this cultural change may be one of the greatest accomplishments of the BCFSC and the industry it represents. This reality is reflected in the comments that a number of people returning to BC from Alberta have made about the forestry sector in the Province – that it looks completely different from the one they left several years ago.

While there is still progress to be made to reduce accidents, incidents, and fatalities, without this cultural shift in how the industry sees itself, future gains would be impossible to achieve.

Code of silence

One of the reasons that the BCFSC established the Ombudsman's Office in 2006 was because it had become clear that "there was a need for industry to provide the means for safety issues to be raised and discussed in as free and open a manner as possible, and that at times this was not occurring."

While the Ombudsman's Office is still used by members, stakeholders and public, it is the freer flow of critical conversations in the marshalling yards, woods, offices, and boardrooms that is an important contributor to the gains that have been achieved in improving safety in the workplace, and one of the reasons that the number of individual enquiries to access the Ombudsman's Office has decreased over the years.

Summary of Activities

The number of enquiries to the Ombudsman office in 2016 was down from 2015 and the nature and source of enquiries continues to change as the dynamics in the industry change.

In many cases, calls to the Office have come from the general public, and not

organizations or individuals working in the forest sector.

The Ombudsman's Office continues to be a resource for individuals, organizations and companies that need help finding information, connecting with the BCFSC and other agencies, and finding answers to questions (such as how to become certified as a faller in BC). The BCFSC in turn continues to be a solid resource to the Ombudsman's Office, and the timely and focused response to enquiries has been of significant benefit to our office in resolving issues quickly.

Enquiries to the office in 2016 included issues related to:

- ◆ Abuse/intimidation in the workplace
- ◆ Resource roads
- ◆ Faller certification
- ◆ Faller supervision
- ◆ Working alone
- ◆ Emergency response and
- ◆ SAFE Companies certification.

Our office is still unclear if the relationship between the BCFSC as the certifying agency, and WSBC as the regulator, is well defined or understood from the perspective of companies and individuals working in the forest sector.

Companies going through the SAFE Companies certification process continue to perceive some conflict between BCFSC and WSBC in terms of "who" is in charge, and whether real or not, this lack of clarity is a distraction from the smooth execution of the SAFE Companies Program.

Outreach

In 2016, the Ombudsman Office participated in a number of forest industry

functions and meetings including: Truck Loggers Association, Council of Forest Industries, Western Forestry Contractors' Association and Falling Technical Advisory Committee.

With the release of the HEMs report, the Office has made a number of community presentations, including in Smithers, Kamloops, and Fort Nelson. The report has garnered a significant amount of interest, including from the North Central Government Association, UBC Centre for Rural Health Research, and several media outlets in BC and across Canada.

2017 Primary Focus

In 2017, the Ombudsman's Office will undertake a review of the Ombudsman Office and its roles and responsibilities as part of an ongoing process to ensure the services provided continue to adapt and are relevant to the changing landscape within the forest sector. In addition, we will undertake the following:

- ◆ Follow up on the HEMs report, which will include a number of community presentations and working with UBC's Centre for Rural Health Research and stakeholders group with the BCFSC who are continuing to advance the recommendations
- ◆ Participate in a number of forest industry sector AGMs and Conferences as part of our ongoing outreach program
- ◆ Participate in the FTAC meetings
- ◆ Respond to enquiries as required.



Roger Harris, Ombudsman, June 2016



You may raise any issue with the BC Forest Safety Ombudsman

After you raise your issue, the Forest Safety Ombudsman's Office will endeavour to contact you within five working days. Please try to include as much of the following information that you feel comfortable giving us. Please note that all information collected by the Forest Safety Ombudsman is treated as confidential and it will not be used or distributed without your express consent. Information that may help us with your application for review:

Name — Phone number — Email address — A detailed description of the issue you wish to bring forward — Location (city, town or region of the Province) — Company or entities involved in your concern.

Send to the Ombudsman via any of these methods:

Fax: 250.741.1068

Mail: The Ombudsman, BC Forest Safety Council, 420 Albert Street, Nanaimo, BC V9R 2V7

Email: harris@bcforestsafe.org

Telephone (toll free): 1-877-577-7766



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