

# Bulletin: Continuation of Silviculture Operations During COVID-19

Western Silvicultural Contractors Association

June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Since the beginning of May, the silviculture sector has been operating under communicable disease prevention guidelines issued by the Provincial Health Office (PHO) of British Columbia. Although conditions have continued to improve, COVID-19 remains a threat to public health, and there is still no viable treatment or vaccine available. Public activity is now entering Phase-3 of the COVID management plan with increased travel and opening of dining and service industries. However, a formal revision of silviculture guidelines by the PHO is not likely to occur until at least the fall season, and is expected to be part of a larger revision of guidelines for all remote and camp-based workplaces. In the meantime, isolated silviculture crews with no signs of COVID-19 infection over multiple weeks of operation have been seeking to make changes in their operations to protect the mental health of employees, respect their civil liberties, and support efficiency of operations.

It is recognized that employers may need to adjust crew management systems and revise policies and practices as they shift to summer operations or move between work locations. At times, this may include the need for workers to visit communities for services, accommodation, and relief from camp isolation.

If companies must adjust their systems and if workers must visit communities and businesses, it is recommended they consider the following principles and precautions:

- Continue to follow a risk-assessment based plan that clearly identifies how COVID is likely to spread into and among the workplace, and the measures and controls in place to prevent it.
- Remind your staff that Phase-3 does NOT mean that the COVID pandemic is over, or that the risk of infection has been reduced to zero. It only means that case counts are at a level where the medical system has capacity to help those that are sick, and further cases are certain to occur.
- Be aware that the general public likely does not follow the same level of care in preventing COVID as workers and may represent a significant risk to worker health. If workers must visit communities or enter public spaces, they should be advised to:
  - Exercise appropriate physical distancing in all public spaces and avoid any busy areas or events where distancing cannot be maintained, or where large crowds may be present.
  - Wash hands frequently and maintain all hygiene supplies and practices in vehicles that are used to visit communities.
  - Avoid visiting communities at busy times such as weekends and avoid visiting businesses during peak hours such as lunch or dinner rush periods.
  - Encourage the use of masks whenever possible when entering public spaces and businesses.
  - Reduce the duration of time spent in public spaces whenever possible.
  - Use take-out dining options whenever possible.
  - Consider making special arrangements with local businesses (i.e. restaurants) so that staff may visit without interacting with the public.
  - Seek to identify appropriate muster and meeting points where public interaction can be minimized. This should include parking in open areas, and at the back of parking lots when necessary.
  - When moving operations between communities, have key staff travel in advance to arrange set meal services and identify appropriate meeting or mustering venues.

- Send one person to shop for others whenever possible. Each additional person that enters a public space or business multiplies the risks of potential transmission.
- Public activity in the backcountry is likely to increase during summer months. If not already having done so, consider posting signs and barriers at camp entrances to deter public access and to indicate that an active COVID management plan is in place.
- Verify the references of all newly arriving workers and ensure that they have adhered to COVID-19 management plans with their previous employers.
- Consider newly-arriving workers as a potential source of risk to current employees. Take steps to limit their contact with other staff until a sufficient period of time has passed to indicate they are free of illness. This may include dedicating separate work-pods to newly arriving workers and assigning them appropriate distanced dining arrangement and deployment times.
- Continue to maintain records of changes to work-pods and direct workers to complete daily health logbooks in order to provide helpful information when moving to other crews and summer work opportunities.
- Be aware that COVID-tests for your staff that are returned negative nonetheless indicate a vulnerability in your workplace, due to the fact that some other illness (i.e. common cold) may have infiltrated your crew, and that COVID could thus follow a similar route of transmission.

Both provincial and world health governing bodies have acknowledged the impact that isolation can have on well-being. Employers should devote time to ensuring the mental health needs of their staff are being met, and that any workers that are experiencing difficulties are made aware of services that are available to assist them. A set of resources for printing and sharing is provided below to assist your staff in the successful completion of their work season.

**Posting for the workplace on stress management:**

[https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health-safety/covid19\\_stressmanagement\\_5\\_accessible.pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health-safety/covid19_stressmanagement_5_accessible.pdf)

**Links for virtual mental health support, including substance abuse, youth, and victims of family or sexual violence:**

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/managing-your-health/mental-health-substance-use/virtual-supports-covid-19>

**Message on managing isolation from Anxiety Canada:**

<https://www.anxietycanada.com/articles/covid19-balancing-public-health-and-mental-health/>

**Mental Health Assessment Tool from Canadian Mental Health Association**

<https://cmhbc.force.com/MentalHealthCheckIn/s/>

Many silviculture employers have been finding creative ways to keep staff satisfied and focused on the goal of a healthy and successful completion to their season. These have included talent shows, film-making challenges, art exhibitions, and events focused on supporting charitable causes. Employers should seek to support their staff and encourage in developing and participating in such initiatives as part of adapting to and coping with the pressures of the work season.