

Date

Organization name  
Mailing address line 1  
line 2  
line 3  
line 4, etc.

Dear Sir/Madam:

I am writing this letter to draw our collective attention to the high number of workplace incidents that have occurred in the forestry industry in British Columbia this year and what we can do to support worker health and safety.

A number of these workplace incidents are associated with manual tree falling and have resulted in serious and fatal consequences for workers. In separate incidents during a short two-week period earlier this spring, two hand fallers suffered fatal injuries and a third faller had a near-miss that could have resulted in a fatal injury. Although the fallers involved were all experienced and known for their good workmanship, the safety systems required to keep them safe failed to protect them.

While investigations are underway to identify the definitive causes of these incidents, it is of benefit to everyone in the industry to remind themselves of the circumstances that often lead to incidents like these and what can be done to address them before another tragic outcome occurs.

### **Lack of adequate supervision in hand falling operations**

Hand fallers have an excessively high injury rate and serious injury rate. The injury rate in the Manual Tree Falling Classification Unit was 20.1, nearly ten times the provincial average of 2.15. The serious injury rate was 6.5, compared to the provincial average of 0.27. Each of these serious injuries represents life-changing consequences for both the workers and their loved ones – and even one such injury is too many when the incidents that cause them are often preventable.

During workplace inspections, our forestry officers have identified a lack of adequate supervision as a primary factor in health and safety issues in this industry. Inadequate supervision most often occurs on sites where the falling supervisor is also an active hand faller. This can be problematic because supervisors are required to have adequate time to perform duties such as participating in the planning of falling work. Other duties should not take them away from their role as a supervisor.

Additionally, the level of supervision provided is often not appropriate for the level of risk or changing conditions. Finally, the supervisors themselves must be effectively supervised by their employers and, as applicable, the Prime Contractors must evaluate and scrutinize their effectiveness both as supervisors and in their capacity as active fallers.

## What are the responsibilities and potential consequences for owners/licensees?

Every workplace party shares responsibility for safety and each party must play a role in controlling risks and creating a safe work environment in which they can do their work without undue risk. In a complex forestry operation, multiple parties may have specific assigned responsibilities under our regulatory framework. After entering into a contract relationship with another party, a licensee or other owner of the operation still has duties and accountabilities for workplace safety.

If any one party fails to fulfill their workplace health and safety responsibilities, serious injury or death could be the result for the worker. Should this happen, the actions of all parties, including owners of operations and licensees, will be fully examined and enforcement measures including the issuance of stop work orders may be put in place.

## Everyone plays a part in building positive change

As an immediate step, WorkSafeBC will continue to conduct focused risk-based inspections of hand falling operations. We will ramp up our inspections beginning in the fall with an increased focus on the **effectiveness** of falling supervision. In the coming months, we will also partner with the BC Forest Safety Council to provide webinars in October on topics related to key responsibilities for safety in forestry, including **effective** supervision for hand fallers.

Achieving positive change needs to be a collaborative effort and stakeholders like yourself play a key role in this process. We look forward to engaging with you and collaborating to ensure hand falling operations are safe for all forestry workers by strengthening supervisory skills and supervision in the woods.

Should you wish to learn more about our risk-based inspections for hand falling operations, please contact **Budd Phillips**, manager, Prevention Field Services ([budd.phillips@worksafebc.com](mailto:budd.phillips@worksafebc.com) or 250.794.4683) or **Tom Pawlowski**, manager, OHS Consultation & Education Services ([tom.pawlowski@worksafebc.com](mailto:tom.pawlowski@worksafebc.com) or 604.233.4062).

Sincerely,



Al Johnson  
Head of Prevention Services