



The Overwhelmed Forest Supervisor: Recognizing Risk and Building Support

A newly promoted supervisor often steps into the role with strong technical knowledge but limited experience in leadership, planning, and managing people. In forestry, where production pressures, safety demands, and changing environmental conditions intersect daily, this gap can quickly lead to overload.

While moderate levels of stress can sharpen focus and performance, excessive stress occurs when job demands exceed a person's ability to cope. If not addressed, this can progress into burnout and increase both operational and safety risks.

How Would an Employer Know if Their Supervisor Was Overwhelmed?

Workplace stress often becomes noticeable through changes in behaviour and work performance. For forestry supervisors, signs of being overwhelmed may emerge in both daily interactions and operational outcomes.

Recognizing these indicators early allows employers to evaluate the potential impact on safety, operational effectiveness, and worker wellbeing. A structured approach such as the **REC (Recognize, Evaluate, Control)** process can help guide employers through identifying, assessing, and responding to these concerns.

The REC Process for Supporting Overwhelmed Supervisors

R RECOGNIZE	Recognize the signs Early indicators that a supervisor may be struggling include both common indicators of stress AND potential operational impacts. Common Stress-Related Behaviours - Increased irritability, frustration, or withdrawal from others - Difficulty making decisions or frequent second-guessing - Fatigue, disorganization, or reduced focus - Decreased communication and engagement with crew members Potential Operational Impacts - Missed deadlines or incomplete documentation - Reduced attention to safety procedures or protocols - Declining team morale or increased workplace conflict - Less consistent presence in the field
E EVALUATE	Evaluate the level of risk Consider potential stress factors such as workload volume (too busy?), number of active sites (spread thin?), administrative demands (computer or paperwork issues), and observed behavioural or operational indicators. Determine whether demands on the supervisor are exceeding available resources and assess the potential impact on safety, performance, and wellbeing.
C CONTROL	Introduce control measures Reduce the stress on the supervisor through workload adjustments, mentoring, clearer priorities, regular check-ins, additional training, and access to mental health resources.

What is Best Practice for Psychological Health and Safety Support?

Psychological health and safety is a core workplace responsibility. The [National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#) emphasizes preventing psychological harm by identifying and managing workplace factors such as role clarity, workload, support, and access to adequate resources. Employers looking to support their new (and experienced) supervisors should consider:

- ✓ **Clear Expectations and Roles:** Unclear roles are a major source of stress. A supervisor who is unsure of their authority or priorities may hesitate or overextend themselves. For example, a new supervisor may be told to keep production up while also being expected to “prioritize safety above all else.” These can be contradictory without clear guidance, creating pressure and uncertainty when conditions change.

Continued on page 26...

- ✓ **Training and Competency Development:** Effective supervisors need more than just technical skills. They also need strong leadership, communication, conflict resolution, and decision-making abilities. BCFSC's Forest Supervisor Training helps build these skills and is a useful resource. Additionally, supervisors need appropriate training for tools they use such as computers and related paperwork, as these can be stressors for many supervisors. Training on its own isn't enough – employers must ensure supervisors are also qualified.
- ✓ **Supervisor Assessment:** "Qualified" means the person has shown they can do the job safely and effectively on the worksite, not just at a course. Employers must assess their supervisors to see if they can apply their job expectations in real situations through field observations and practical demonstrations. An effective assessment process with ongoing feedback is a key aspect of ongoing supervisor development.
- ✓ **Workload Management:** Excessive workload is a leading contributor to stress. For example, a supervisor responsible for multiple remote sites may spend most of the day traveling, leaving little time for inspecting worksites, planning work, meeting with workers, or conducting safety checks. This can lead to rushed decisions and missed hazards. While it can be difficult to reduce workload demands on supervisors, especially during challenging economic times, employers should look for innovative ways to maintain a sustainable workload. This can include clearly identifying what is most important, so supervisors can easily prioritise work when presented with a conflict or by finding ways to reduce duplication or waste. Ask the workers as

they may have excellent ideas on opportunities to streamline things.

- ✓ **Leadership, Mentorship, and Ongoing Communication:** New supervisors benefit from experienced peers and leaders who can provide guidance and foster open, consistent communication. Structured mentorship and regular check-ins help identify emerging issues early, provide reassurance in unfamiliar situations, and enable timely workload adjustments before challenges escalate. For example, a regular check-in may reveal that a supervisor is unsure whether they have the authority to stop work when conditions change. Early guidance from a manager or mentor can clarify expectations and prevent hesitation during critical situations.
- ✓ **Access to Mental Health Programs and Resources:** Helping supervisors maintain a healthy work-life balance is important. This can include adaptable scheduling that considers mental well-being and providing programs such as an Employee and Family Assistance

Program (EFAP) and/or BCFSC's Connection to Care program. Keeping a clear and healthy mind-set helps the supervisor to focus on the job, not on other problems and distractions.

Conclusion

An overwhelmed forest supervisor is not simply an individual issue. It is an early warning sign of organizational risk.

By recognizing the signs and applying structured controls, organizations can bolster supervisor sustainability and maintain safe, effective operations. Proactively managing workload and expectations enables supervisors to make sound decisions, maintain strong leadership, and ensure consistent performance in the field.

Focusing on supervisor support strengthens both operational resilience and long-term workforce effectiveness across the forestry sector. 🧠



Over 10,000 People Have Enrolled in BCFSC's Resource Road Driver Training

BC Forest Safety Council (BCFSC) is celebrating a significant milestone in resource road safety. Over the last 5 years, 10,430 people have enrolled in the online Resource Road Driver Training program. Originally developed and delivered by the WFCFA and the late Alan Sidorov, this training is designed specifically to help drivers safely navigate BC's resource roads.

The milestone reflects a growing recognition that driving on resource roads requires a unique set of skills, knowledge, and decision-making that differs significantly from driving on paved roadways.

The total includes enrollments in BCFSC's free online knowledge course, as well as participants who completed the course as a prerequisite for BCFSC's in-field Resource Road Driver Training courses. It does not include the many in-person training courses delivered across the province. As a result, the overall reach of the resource road driver training is much higher.

Resource Road Safety Is Everyone's Responsibility

When people think of resource roads, they picture forestry workers hauling equipment and wood fibre to and from remote worksites. While the harvesting sector users remain a major part of resource road traffic, today these roads are shared by a much broader range of users like forestry professionals, silviculture contractors, utility crews, natural resource workers, Indigenous communities, and recreational users exploring BC's backcountry. This mix of industrial and recreational traffic makes safe driving practices more important than ever.

Unlike public highways, resource roads often have unique challenges like sharp corners, steep grades, changing surface conditions, limited visibility and radio-controlled traffic. Whether someone is travelling to a worksite or heading out to explore the outdoors, understanding how these roads operate, and how to communicate effectively with other users, can help prevent incidents and improve safety for everyone.

Free Training for Anyone Who Uses Resource Roads

One of the reasons the Resource Road Driver Knowledge Unit has been so successful is its accessibility. While the online course serves as a prerequisite for BCFSC's practical training programs, it is free and available to anyone interested in learning how to travel safely on resource roads.



By removing the cost barrier, we can support a shared culture of safety among everyone who uses BC's resource road network. Those who have taken the free knowledge unit course have learned safe driving practices for resource road environments including how their actions impact their driving decisions, common resource road hazards, radio communications and road procedures, and emergency response.

From Online Learning to Hands-On Experience

The Resource Road Driver Knowledge Unit is only the first step in BCFSC's broader Resource Road Driver Training Program. Participants can continue their learning through the one-day Resource Road Safety Training course or the comprehensive two-day Resource Road Driver Training course delivered by Tirion Safety Ltd. These hands-on courses are designed to give participants the confidence and practical experience in real-world driving situations needed to safely navigate the challenges commonly encountered on resource roads.

A Milestone Worth Celebrating

For BCFSC, reaching that milestone of over 10,000 enrollments is about more than a number. It represents thousands of individuals taking the time to learn how their actions behind the wheel affect not only their own safety, but also the safety of everyone sharing the road.

After all, whether you're driving to a worksite, a fishing spot, a campsite, or a trailhead, safe resource road travel starts with knowledge. And thanks to more than 10,000 enrollments and counting, that message is reaching more people than ever before. 🌲

Fall 2026 BC Forestry Safety Training

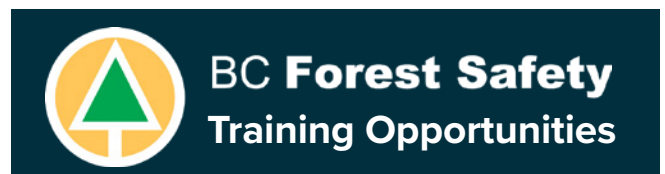
If you're looking to sharpen your skills or brush up on your knowledge, BCFSC's in-person training courses can help. Led by experienced industry professionals, our courses offer practical learning specifically designed for forestry workers and supervisors. Choose from courses like the Basics of Incident Investigation, Falling Supervisor, Leadership and Communication for Forest Supervisors, and Due Diligence for Forest Supervisors and gain knowledge and insights to help strengthen safety performance at your worksite.

Our courses are available across the province, so register today to secure your spot. And if our scheduled in-person courses don't work with your schedule, contact us to request training delivered in-person to a location and time that works for you and your crew.

Forestry Training Fund Available in BC

In July 2026, a new \$6.9 million Forestry Training Fund was announced. This funding is available to eligible forestry employers in BC, including community forests. [Learn more here.](#) 

Start Date	Location	Course
October 5	Nelson	Falling Supervisor
October 21	Nelson	Due Diligence for Forest Supervisors
October 23	Nelson	Basics of Incident Investigation
October 29	Kamloops	Due Diligence for Forest Supervisors
November 3	Campbell River	Falling Supervisor
November 5	Prince George	Due Diligence for Forest Supervisors
November 16	Nelson	Leadership & Communication for Forest Supervisors
November 18	Prince George	Leadership & Communication for Forest Supervisors
November 20	Prince George	Basics of Incident Investigation
November 25	Kamloops	Leadership & Communication for Forest Supervisors
November 27	Kamloops	Basics of Incident Investigation
December 2	Campbell River	Leadership & Communication for Forest Supervisors
December 4	Campbell River	Basics of Incident Investigation



**BC Forest Safety
Training Opportunities**



Workplace safety starts with the right training.

BC Forest Safety Council (BCFSC) delivers targeted supervisor training, along with practical worker training and assessment programs that strengthen safety and performance across your operation.

Train smarter, work safer with help from the BC Forest Safety Council

Visit the BCFSC Training webpage to find out more.





BC Forest Safety Training Solutions

BCFSC Training Options for You and Your Team

Empower your workforce with trusted training from the BC Forest Safety Council. Whether you're looking to build skills, stay compliant or enhance safety culture BCFSC has you covered.

We Offer:



[In-Person Training](#)

Plan ahead with our 2026 Course Schedule.



[Requested Training](#)

Can't make it to an in-person session? We can come to you.
Email us at training@bcforestsafety.org or call 1.877.741.1060



[Free Online Training](#)

Learn at your own pace - anytime, anywhere.



[Free Worker Assessment Resources](#)

Train and assess your workers on-the-job.



[Webinars and Webinar Recordings](#)

Stay informed with our live and recorded sessions.



[Safety Alerts](#)

Subscribe for safety insights and industry shares.



[Safety Resources](#)

Browse our wide range of downloadable materials to help you do your job safely – in all areas of forestry.

