

Western Fallers Association

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SEPTEMBER 22, 2005 - 13:00 ET

Western Fallers Association: Tree Fallers Report Cites Lack of Safety Measures for Carnage in B.C. Forests

VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA--(CCNMatthews - Sept. 22, 2005) - Western Fallers Association -

The first ever report on safety in the woods by the workers who fall the trees in B.C. condemns the industry, Workers Compensation Board and Ministry of Forests for allowing unsafe practices to result in unnecessary deaths and serious injuries.

Citing an industry attitude of 'just do it' and 'whatever it takes to get the job done', the report says B.C.'s forested slopes have turned into death zones with fallers working below cliffs or in debris left by heavy equipment. Fallers have been bombarded with snags, deadfalls and, in some cases, logs being cut by fallers above them who are being pressured to produce at all costs.

Calling for significant changes in practices and regulations, the report by the Western Fallers Association says the industry must adopt a change of attitude at all levels before the forests will be a safe workplace. The report says logging contractors who don't ensure the safety of their forest workers should be shut down.

The 70-page document covers all aspects of forestry operations. It recommends current practices and regulations be reviewed to take into account the safety of forest workers. Each logging site should have a plan that takes worker safety into consideration and that supervisors be trained and mandated to be on the site to make safety a top priority.

The report was compiled from information received from fallers whose occupation is generally viewed as the most dangerous on the planet. So far this year, four fallers have lost their lives in B.C.'s forests and many more have been seriously injured.

Called A View From The Field, the report was compiled from interviews with many of the 250 self employed independent fallers who are members of the Western Fallers Association. The report was funded by the B.C. Forest Safety Council which has implemented a certification program to educate fallers on safe work practices.

The report cites debris left by road builders and heavy logging machinery as a major cause of accidents involving fallers. The practice of stacking fallers on steep grades is condemned as a contributing factor to accidents when logs have the potential to 'torpedo' down slopes toward fallers working below.

Retention or selective harvesting of species or grades of wood while leaving much of the forest standing to answer environmental concerns is described as a dangerous practice. Selective harvesting forces fallers to break numerous WCB regulations that have been put in place for their safety.

The report recommends this practice of falling selected trees in congested areas be either stopped or done only by fallers who have advanced formal training.

The 'push' by logging contractors to get the job done quickly compromises safety and is listed as a major cause of accidents. Some licensees delay logging, waiting to pay lower stumpage fees, which can result in fallers having less time to do the work. The report urges the provincial Ministry of Forests to 'smooth out' issuing cutting permits so the working season is stretched out to give fallers more time to do their jobs safely.

The report states that fallers wanting to comply with safety regulations are often condemned and fallers who ignore the regulations are rewarded with more work.

The Workers Compensation Board was criticized for giving a one day advance warning of inspection of logging operations allowing bad operators the chance to 'straighten things up enough to pass inspection'.

"Until the fallers know that it is proper to operate safely, that they are hearing and seeing this from management at all levels and that their livelihoods will not be held for ransom, nothing with regard to fallers' accidents and fatalities is going to change," says Mike McKibbin, president of the Western Fallers Association and author of the report.

Among the report's recommendations are mandatory radio and headsets so fallers and equipment operators can communicate conditions and warnings, not working in excessive heat, an end to long periods of work without days off and a study to determine the amount of work a faller can safely do in a day.

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