

**“Cost of Doing Business - BC Logging” Sunday Edition, CBC Radio, National
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Anchor/Reporters: Michael Enright, Karin Wells MICHAEL ENRIGHT (CBC-R): On the last day of his life, Ted Gramlich got up early and kissed his girlfriend goodbye. She said, have a safe day, honey. And he picked up his pack and headed into the mountains of Vancouver Island. He met his fellow loggers and they drove up into the bush. He put on his hard hat, strapped his radio to his chest and picked up his chain saw, enough gas for the day and a gallon of oil. Eighty pounds of gear. And then he hiked through the woods and started falling trees, just like he always did.

But that afternoon, a tree came down the wrong way and hit Ted Gramlich. He rolled eighty feet down the mountain. The First Aid couldn't reach him for forty-five minutes. The helicopter couldn't land. And they had to lower a stretcher to lift him off the mountain. He died before reaching the hospital.

A couple of years ago, the death of Ted Gramlich wouldn't have even made the local paper. But Ted Gramlich was the fortieth logger to die in British Columbia in two thousand and five. By the end of the year, the death toll had reached forty-three, more than twice as many deaths as the

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year before. They were fallers, machine operators and log haulers. Forty-three men dead. In one industry. In one province.

The next highest industrial death count in BC is in construction where nine men died. The loggers are saying enough is enough, something has to change in British Columbia's forest industry. The death of Ted Gramlich was the turning point.

Here is Karin Wells' documentary, “The Cost of Doing Business.”

BILL BORDMAN (Logger, British Columbia): My name's Bill Bordman. That's Ted's girlfriend, Debbie and Jim Huntchuk.

KARIN WELLS (Reporter, CBC): Turbo Ted, that's what they called him. He and Bill Bordman hired on together back in 1980. They'd been cutting trees together for twenty-five years. Bill Bordman was the first to arrive at the Little Funeral Home in Duncan on Vancouver Island.

BORDMAN: I can see him smiling with his balding head and his pony tail and thick wrists, like a lot of us do from working and packing chain saws and carrying axes. And his smile with these big kind of wolf teeth in the front.

I just loved that guy.

I can look back on a list of ten guys, when I hired in 1980. And of the ten, four of us are still cutting trees. And three of those guys got out and three of us are now dead.

It's a hell of a price you pay for doing business in B.C.

WELLS: There are about fifty people in this room. Eight or so women, mainly family. The rest men, mostly middle-aged, solitary men, other fallers. Men like Dean Bloski.

DEAN BLOSKI (Logger, British Columbia): We're into dangerous, more dangerous situations every day.

WELLS: Bill Boxtam.

BILL BOXTAM (Logger, British Columbia): All's we ever hear is push, push, push, push, push, push.

WELLS: And Jim Huntchuk.

JIM HUNTCHUK (Logger, British Columbia): Like there are a lot of guys out there right now wondering what the hell went wrong.

WELLS: What went wrong the day Ted Gramlich died? What's been going wrong in B.C. forests over the past year?

TANNER ELTON: (Chief Executive Officer, British Columbia Forest Safety Council): My name's

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Tanner Elton. I'm the CEO of the B.C. Forest Safety Council. All of the organizations, including the companies, the contractors, the unions and all of the government agencies are part of our organization. We're a year old.

And I've been going to a lot of funerals.

WELLS: Forest safety councils of various sorts have come and gone over the years in British Columbia. But this is the first one that's included the workers and the huge logging companies.

ELTON: What you need to understand is that this has been an extremely dangerous industry always. It's also had high levels of fatality and injuries since the eighteen hundreds. So one of the issues was that there's a certain complacency, fatalism and all that kind of stuff. And it had become routine. Not only was it continuing to occur, no one was noticing.

So we started putting out the names. When we hit sixteen, we said oh my goodness, there's something different going on here. I mean we were having a bad year.

There are certain moments, at some point there's a defining moment. And I think that defining moment occurred with these last couple of fatalities. And in particular, this one.

Now we're talking about it.

WELLS: Loggers themselves often didn't know what was going on, didn't talk about it. That has changed. Two years ago, they set up the Western Fallers Association. Now they phone, they e-mail each other.

DAVE GASKAL (Logger, British Columbia): I think we've always been angry but nobody ever knew we were angry.

WELLS: Dave Gaskal is also a faller. Traditionally, when there have been forest accidents, the popular wisdom was that these guys were risk takers, it was their fault. They were also seen as the rednecks of B.C. And in an era of environmental reform, they weren't very popular.

The logging community tended to close ranks. And when a logger died on the top of some remote mountain, no one really noticed.

ELTON: It's sort of out-of-sight-out-of-mind. And I also think too that we're starting to realize that it's unacceptable. We're more savvy in that we realize that the whole goal of this thing is to be able to get to retirement age, you know? Ted was fifty-three, was he? Okay.

This is always going to be an inherently dangerous job. But it doesn't have to be inherently deadly.

WELLS: Ted Gramlich is lying in his coffin in a grey sweatshirt and the tight little hat he always wore. His thick wrists and his big hands are crossed over his belly. Credence Clear Water Revival, his favorite band, blares out in the little chapel.

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Fallers are the men who yell timber in the movies and take a two hundred foot tree down single-handedly with a chain saw. In real life, fallers are supposed to go into the woods with a partner. Regulations say they should always be within earshot of each other.

On the day he was killed, Gramlich was assigned to take down trees in a place where he couldn't see or hear his partner. There was no trail cut in the bush between them. There should have been. There was no helicopter landing pad. There should have been. The helicopter was fogged in.

In B.C., forestry is a pyramid. The big timber companies on this job at West Timberwest lease cutting rights from the Province. Timberwest then contracts out the falling operation. And the fallers, like Gramlich and Bill Bordman, pick up short-term work from the contractors. Everything, including safety, is passed down the line.

BORDMAN: When I started doing this, when my grandfather did it, my father, we were kind of giants in the industry. The fallers were the king of the, cock of the walk, I guess you'd call them. And now we're just, we're more like transient grape pickers.

I started in the woods in 1969. Got out of high school and went to work in the woods. And you're a union employee and all the rest of that.

And then there were safety? You know there were safety programs in place because there was a network of the union behind you. A shop steward that you could complain to. And something would actually be done about it.

It's changed. Today's companies breaking the unions and contracting everything out. And the Government letting them do it. But you now when you haven't worked for three months and somebody comes along and offers you the job, and you just think well I don't like it but you know I need some money. And you know it'll be all right, you know I've been doing this a long time, I'll just be real careful.

Well that's why they call them accidents. Ted didn't go in there with the idea that he wasn't coming back out. I know for a fact that Ted, two days before he died, said we shouldn't be

working in this kind of weather. There's too much fog. And Brock just said you either suck it up and keep cutting, he said, or pack your gear and get the hell out of here. I'll find somebody that will.

WELLS: The contractor on this job was Brock Brown. Eleven months earlier, a faller nearly lost his arm on one of his jobs. WorkSafe B.C issued two orders against his company. In the spring, another faller was killed working for Brown.

As fallers like Bill Boxtam see it, money trumps safety.

BOXTAM: Yeah, it's like the contractors are hungry enough that they will compete against each other, right, with the hope of staying above water. But they're basically working below cost. So

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how do you work below cost? You cut corners, you compromise safety. When you compromise safety, then the body count goes up.

We're not fallers anymore. Now we're "Mcfallers", right? You know Wall-Mart fallers. What do you want to call us, right?

BORDMAN: You know if one guy dies in the woods unnecessarily, isn't that enough to get you angry? There are forty dead guys in the industry.

WELLS: By the end of the year, forty-three.

BOXTAM: The truckers are catching up or surpassing us now because there's more and more hauling on the roads. Because they're exporting all this wood to the US. I feel sorry for the truckers.

WELLS: For the first time, the fallers are starting to notice the trucker deaths and the truckers notice the fallers.

MARIANNE ARCAND (TruckSafe British Columbia): Somehow we've transcended the numbers thing to the real people. And there's another wife and another kid who's dad is not coming home. It's suddenly become like a big family. And we're all hurting.

WELLS: Marianne Arcand lives and works in Prince George, four hundred and fifty miles north of Vancouver Island. She runs TruckSafe BC, part of the Forest Safety Council.

ARCAND: It was about two o'clock Saturday afternoon and my boss, Tanner Elton and I were doing this thing over the phone. His cell phone rang. He says, another faller, I cannot believe this. We both just sat there. And he's in Vancouver and I'm here in Prince George weeping over the phone, going what? What are we going to do?

WELLS: And she sits in her office with a pile of newspaper clippings on the deaths of loggers in front of her.

ARCAND: Look at the calendar behind you. I mark them. This was Ted, Vancouver Island. This was a faller two weeks before him in Adams Lake. October, there was a double there.

WELLS: This year is the first time anyone has ever listed the names of every dead logger. But now, they're all up there on MaryAnne Arcand's calendar.

ARCAND: It's a little bit morbid but I mean it keeps me grounded. This is why we're doing this, you know. It's sort of been accepted, there's a resignation that oh well that's just the cost of doing business. And that's the part that really makes me sad.

So all you're going to have for warnings, see this sign here?

WELLS: Yeah.

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ARCAND: Here's the sign, there's logging trucks on the road. That's it.

WELLS: When you drive through Prince George, there are logging trucks everywhere, almost twice as many as a year ago.

There are two things at work. First there has been an infestation of pine beetles in British Columbia. Those little insects have killed nearly every pine tree in the northern half of the Province. They have to be cut down fast.

And second, for environmental reasons, the Province wants those trees cut in the winter while the ground is frozen. To drive home the point, the Province increases the tax it charges the timber companies on every tree as soon as the ground softens up. For the big companies to make money, more trees have to be hauled in less time.

That means the truckers have to drive longer hours.

ARCAND: Our drivers are pros but they're tired. They're exhausted. They're working fifteen, sixteen, seventeen hours a day, six days straight. Well there's all kinds of medical studies that

show by the time you've driven fifteen hours, you're as cognitively impaired as if you have at a point zero, five blood alcohol reading. And with every hour more than that, it doubles just about. Sleep deprivation is cumulative.

So by Wednesday, they're basically impaired for the rest of the week and yet they're going to keep driving, right.

WELLS: Log haulers used to work a nine or ten month season, at something like a reasonable pace. Now it's six or seven months, if they're lucky, of intense work. And it's an ageing work force. The average trucker is forty-eight.

ARCAND: The women are starting to get together. And now I've got wives calling me here saying, okay what can we do. I'm terrified every day when my husband goes out there. We have some widows, unfortunately.

We're going to see a grassroots movement coming from the families of these guys that say no, no more. I'm not driving here, it's just too dangerous, I'm going home. And that has to come from within themselves, from within their own ranks.

BRENDA DAILY (Wife): My name's Brenda Daily and I am connected to the logging industry as the wife of a log hauler.

WELLS: Brenda Daily has never been much of an activist. But she heard that some of the women on the Island had staged a protest outside a contractor's office after the death of Ted Gramlich. So she picked up the phone and she talked to one of the logging wives.

DAILY: ...and she said, they were told to get off the property and get back home and look after your husbands where you belong.

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My husband's name is Ray Micock and he's been hauling since 1967, '68. Thirty-eight, almost forty years coming up.

My husband has kept up with everything he has been asked to do. Upgraded his truck, does all what is required of him. And he just asks for in return to be safe on the job and to be respected for forty years of hauling for basically one company.

Watching my husband go downhill, you know being proud of his profession to now wondering what he's doing in it. He's a tough man. And most of the log haulers and the fallers, I always look at them, they've got grit, they've got good work ethics. These men are treated almost as robots. Just work the guys. It doesn't matter all of a sudden if they work eighteen hours. And the guys do it because when they get home the bank's phoning. You can't make a living or a livelihood on six to seven months of the year work.

And it never used to be that way. It just seems that when you get a monopoly or one corporation, like it's just changed.

WELLS: In the past ten years, mergers and buy-outs have meant that now two giant logging companies, West Fraser and CANFOR, dominate the industry in northern British Columbia. They call the shots. And if the individual log haulers don't like it, there's nowhere else to go.

Brenda Daily got more and more angry, as the money got tighter and the forest fatality count rose.

DAILY: I thought, if my husband was killed this winter, I wanted something documented. Horrible thing to think, if he gets killed this winter, I want some paperwork, I want something to document where he was, what happened. I didn't want someone to say he was driving too fast. I wanted more because I knew there was more to the story.

WELLS: There is no legal limit on the number of days in a row that a trucker can drive, despite the medical studies. But there is a maximum number of hours per day. It's up to the truckers to take themselves off the road when they've hit the maximum.

Work Safe BC, Workers Compensation is supposed to check the driver's log books.

DAILY: Like fifteen hours is the magic number right now, from the time he leaves home to the time he gets home. But no one's checking any time. I mean they could work eighteen hours, nobody knows. And because his hours are getting longer and longer, I was more aware of the risk factor. I mean you know you drive twelve hours, you drive fifteen hours, you drive sixteen hours, all of a sudden your risk factor goes up incredibly.

WELLS: In thirty-seven years, WorkSafe BC has never checked Ray Micock's log book. Until recently, there were only two WorkSafe BC officers to cover five hundred thousand square kilometres of the Province.

Brenda Daily is driving me out to the mill this morning to meet Ray. He started working at four and
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he's already driven out to the bush to pick up one load of trees. He will make three trips before the day is out. Each trip should take five hours. There's no time for flat tires or anything else.

DAILY: He's going to come by any minute with a big load of logs on. Oh here he comes. There he is, yeah.

You see now that's a big load.

They have to watch so carefully, Karin. I mean look at that behind his head. See that. That's when I get so tough because I think you know?

WELLS: She thinks how little it would take for that load to shift or the truck to tip or the tires to slip. And the words just trail off.

Brenda Daily heads back to town. Ray Micoock starts back into the bush to pick up his second load. And I go with him.

RAY MICOOCK (Log Hauler, British Columbia): They're widening the roads out here.

WELLS: That's what you wanted.

MICOOCK: Yeah, that's right. Well that's good. There are some narrow spots out here that are pretty tricky meeting another load in. You'll see for yourself.

WELLS: The trucks bringing logs to mill radio ahead, loaded at "Thirteen K", they say. The static can be so bad you can barely hear. But it's the only way a log hauler knows if there's a loaded truck coming towards him. Or a pick-up truck full of tree planters or a semi-trailer carrying an oil rig.

The road in some places is only twenty-two or twenty-three feet wide. A logging truck is ten and a half feet wide.

MICOOCK: So if you've got two of those meeting one another, so you don't have much room in the middle there to clear the other truck. That's the problem. It depends how close you get to the outside. But you don't want to get too close to the edge of the road with these loads on.

WELLS: You tip over.

MICOOCK: Yeah, that's right. This is a narrow spot here.

WELLS: Thirty foot drop down the side.

MICOOCK: Yeah, for sure, yeah.

WELLS: Logging roads and who travels on them are a big part of MaryAnne Arcand's business.

ARCAND: You know you've got a narrow logging road designed for one truck, about half the size
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of what they are today, because it was designed thirty years ago. So you've got loaded trucks going one way, you've got empty trucks coming back in to get the wood. And then you've got ore trucks coming out from these remote place. Plus half the time in the north, there's a First Nations Community lives on the end of that thing. So these guys are playing dodge truck all the way. I mean it's a zoo. And because they're resource roads, as we call them, they're not policed by the RCMP. Ministry of Forest has not issued a speeding or traffic ticket - they're the ones that can enforce - in two years on those roads.

So there's this whole big piece of the world up here that have no enforcement, no policing. It's the wild, wild, west. You bet. And the cowboys are jamming eighteen gears and they've got a hundred thousand pounds of logs behind them. Yeah.

WELLS: There are forty thousand kilometres of public roads in B.C. A hundred and forty thousand kilometres of forest service roads, with no maintenance standards, no design standards, no policing.

Ray Micoock is fifty-seven years old. And it's not as though he's getting rich. At the moment, dinner for two at the Keg is a luxury. And he's behind on his truck payments.

MICOOCK: Now back in eighty-five, I was making a hundred bucks an hour.

WELLS: Ten years ago when gas was cheaper and when there was a longer season, truckers made good money. Not now.

MICOOCK: How can you make a living at that?

WELLS: What do you take home?

MICOOCK: Probably my net is probably around thirty-five to thirty-eight thousand.

WELLS: And that's for working like an eighty hour week sometimes.

MICOCK: Yeah, I've been up to ninety-seven hours a week. I didn't count the day I worked on the truck on the weekend.

So up till ninety-five, I was getting nine and a half to ten months of the year and everything was going fine. I could stop and have a coffee, take my time. We weren't rushed. You can't stop and have a coffee. You just can't stop because you have to get that last load in.

WELLS: Last year, some of the very independent-minded truckers banded together and refused to haul to the mill. They enlisted the help of the United Steel Workers. This was about money and safety. The company they hauled for, CANFOR, made record profits in two thousand and four. The truckers ended up with a little more money but the pace didn't slow down. Brenda Daily was still worried. She started phoning CANFOR.

DAILY: Probably my second call to the Safety Officer, I mentioned the hours the workers were 15

putting in, sometimes six days a week. And I mentioned last spring or late winter after the strike, and he said, it serves them right for going on strike that they had to work long hours and weekends. And this is our Safety Officer. I thought you know we really don't count.

WELLS: None of this comes as any surprise to MaryAnne Arcand.

ARCAND: What happens if you complain too much, you loose your job. The squeaky wheel does not get the grease in this situation. The squeaky wheel gets in trouble.

I get calls pretty much every day here from truckers all over the Province saying I can't get work for my truck because I've been complaining and complaining and complaining about the road.

They have orders and positions and so he'll be the last guy called kind of thing, right. So the message is there, isn't it?

WELLS: The President of CANFOR, Jim Shepherd, is also President of the B.C. Forest Safety Council. He speaks a good deal about safety. And CANFOR has made changes, hired road marshals, put in a hotline. The Government is expected to put safety standards in place on the roads. And there are more Work Safe BC officers being hired.

MaryAnne Arcand is optimistic, but guardedly. There have been too many years of what's said in the boardroom not being implemented in the bush. And of an industry that's set up to pass the buck when it comes to safety.

ARCAND: I also find some abdication. Not my problem, right? Well I'm sorry it is. It's all of our problem. And not just in terms of taking our own responsibility but holding the other guys accountable.

WELLS: So it's deregulations.

ARCAND: It's cutbacks. It's contracting out. It's just this whole combination of stuff. And certainly trying to look like they're taking responsibility. While we have a safety plan in place, you know it's hanging on the wall. We have a plan, we have a plan, woo, woo, woo. But that means nothing. We have regulations, yeah, well so do something with them.

WELLS: Do people talk about it when the last logger, Ted Gramlich, was killed?

MICOCK: Yeah. Lots of talk about it yeah. Most of them have families and kids. You know I want to be around and walk my daughter down the aisle and that, you know.

I haven't lost a load in thirty-seven years. I've been a good trucker, I think.

WELLS: Are you worried now?

MICOCK: Yes, I am, very. Very. But now I could bake bread. I could do anything. I could work in Tim Horton's and I'd be happier.

WELLS: You've had enough of this?

MICOCK: Yeah. Okay our turn.

WELLS: And Ray Micock reverses his empty truck up the hill in the bush to pick up another hundred thousand pounds of logs.

ARCAND: The guys have had enough. We see parents, myself included - I've got two sons who are now in their thirties - discouraging their kids from going to work in the bush. It's just too dangerous.

My son would be safer on patrol in Afghanistan than he would in the bush here. We have lost more loggers than we've lost soldiers, policemen and firemen in the line of duty in the last five years. How ridiculous is that?

It comes down to money. I mean if you want to get straight to it, it comes down to the money, yeah.

Money being invested in safety, money being paid, enough so the guys can take the time to be safe.

There's not a log or a stick of lumber that's worth the price of someone's life. And yet it seems to be okay. Somehow over the last thirty years it's become acceptable that yeah, well a few guys are going to die but we've got to get that wood out. I don't get it.

BOXTAM: Besides being very sad, I'm angry today. I've been angry this whole week. And I'll be angry for some time to come.

I'd like to ask Ted "what were you thinking? Why were you working on those conditions?" You knew better. But it has to be important to all of us that Ted's death means something more. When unsafe becomes unprofitable for these corporations and contractors that we all work for, then and only then will things start to change.

WELLS: So far this year, no one has died on the job. Everyone is holding their breath. No one wants to be the first statistic. No one is forgetting last year. No one is forgetting Ted Gramlich.

UNIDENTIFIED: Six months ago, I went to another friend's. He was my partner for four months last year. He saved my life last year. So I've lost two close friends in one year.

Like how much more devastation are you going to take?

My wife asks me every day, did you work in the wind and fog? No, honey. I made a promise.

WELLS: For the Sunday Edition, in Duncan, B.C., I'm Karin Wells. *****

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