

**Statements
(Standing Order 25B)**

WORKER DEATHS IN FOREST INDUSTRY

C. James: I rise today to address an issue of critical importance to working families in this province and of critical importance to one of our most valued industries. It's an issue that demands immediate action from this government because it involves the lives of B.C.'s workers.

[DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

So far this year, 27 workers have died in B.C.'s forest industry, an appallingly high rate of death and the highest of any industry. The B.C. Forest Safety Council expects this rate to increase. While that prospect is frightening in itself, I want to put this rate in perspective. The number of Canadian peacekeepers who have died on active duty in some of the world's most dangerous conflicts is 107 in the past 50 years. The number of forest workers who have died in B.C. alone in the last ten years, 250. That's an average of 25 workers per year who went to work in B.C.'s forests and who never came home. It's unacceptable, and it's time for government to act.

[DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

The truck loggers association has said something drastic needs to be done. The western fallers association, whose members are at the greatest risk of death, have actively called on the government to do something. The United Steelworkers, who represent forest workers across this province, have demanded action. The B.C. Forest Safety Council has said the situation is unacceptable. I join with them today in calling on the government to act, and to act now, to ensure that every worker who sets out for work in the morning to work in our forests arrives home safely. [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

**IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES
ON FOREST WORKER SAFETY**

C. Puchmayr: Today a report was released by the Western Fallers Association on workplace safety in the lumber industry. The government's own Forest Safety Council has tracked 27 deaths and 58 serious injuries so far this year. Every single one of these is preventable. Clearly, something must be done to address workplace safety across the province.

[DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

The Liberal government over the last four years has reduced workplace safety inspections by 45 percent. Written orders are down by 49 percent. Employer penalties are down by 36 percent. Can the minister please tell British Columbians how many of these cutbacks have occurred in the forest sector? [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

Hon. M. de Jong: Thanks to the member for raising the report. The numbers are terrible by any measure. In fact, the numbers that I have suggest that you can add three to that list of 27. This morning I spoke with the president of the Fallers Association and also spoke with the head of the Forest Safety Council, and we are convening immediately with all of the stakeholders to

settle upon a specific strategy. [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

Some work has been done; some good work has been done, but as Mike of the Fallers Association said: "There's no silver bullet here." There is a whole series of issues that need to be addressed in a comprehensive and coordinated manner to take care of a situation which, if it existed in any other walk of life, would be attracting howls of outrage and attention. [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

Mr. Speaker: The member has a supplemental. [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

[1445]

C. Puchmayr: The Steelworkers recently passed a resolution, calling this the industry's dirty little secret. I want to quote the minister from 2003, where he said: "Working together, we will see significant decline in death and injury in the woods." What we have seen is an actual increase

H076/ebp/1445

and I want to quote the minister in 2003, where he said: "Working together, we will see significant decline in death and injury in the woods." What we have seen is an actual increase in deaths and injuries so far. My question again to the Labour Minister: what is the government doing now to reduce the number of deaths in the forest sector? [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

Hon. M. de Jong: Again to the member, I appreciate the reference to the steelworkers union. Again, I have been in contact with Mr. Hunt; I've endeavoured.... I think there was also involvement by Mr. Wong. All of the stakeholders involved in this have got to get together. [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

Some good work has been done. The forestry safety council that was established by the government — by my predecessor, in fact — has done that work, has identified.... But as this report that the member is referring to today and the numbers themselves reveal, we've got a long ways to go. [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

If you look back over the trend, not just five years, not just ten years, but over 20 years, the reference the member makes to the industry's dirty little secret is, I think, a very accurate one. The numbers are deplorable. One death is too many deaths. You look at what has taken place over the last period of time. [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

We're going to convene that group. I'm going to suggest to them that we set some very specific objectives, which we can measure over the course of the next weeks and months, and attack this in detail. [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

B. Simpson: The Western Fallers Association report that was released today and that the minister is referencing also indicated that forest policy changes and cuts to the Ministry of Forests have created conditions in the workplace that are increasing the hazards for workers. [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

One of the things that has gone on is a shortening of the permitting cycle. The shorter season puts pressure on the fallers to fall as many trees as they possibly can in the shortest amount of time. According to the association and the report, the push by logging contractors to get the job done quickly compromises safety and is listed as a major cause of accidents. [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

Will the Minister of Labour include in his review that he is announcing today an analysis of those forest policy changes, with a view to correcting the cuts and the changes in forest policy that are increasing the hazards in the workplace? [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

Hon. M. de Jong: Thanks again to the member for the question. Actually, lest I leave any misimpression, I think the time for review has passed. I think it is time for action. If you look at these numbers and the combination of factors that the report itself identifies.... The member is from a part of the province where increased cuts attributable to the pine beetle infestation are very much a reality. You look at how that is translated into increased danger on the roadways for not just the transportation of wood products, of logs out of the woods, but the number of accidents related to travelling to and from work. [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

So there is a combination of factors. On the coast there are issues relating to the greater use of helicopter logging — from an environmental perspective, something very much encouraged. On the other hand, the after-effects of that on the ground are making the life of fallers, according to this report, very much more difficult. [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

There is a whole series of issues that this group, the safety council, are going to have to address and as the president told me this morning, everyone's going to have to roll up their sleeves, everyone is going to have to — as I think they have — realize...

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, minister. [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

Hon. M. de Jong: ...it is not about assigning blame to anyone, but we've got to fix it. [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

Mr. Speaker: The member has a supplemental. [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

B. Simpson: The minister is correct; it is time for action. The task force recommendations were tabled, and 20 recommendations have not yet been implemented. However, the report tabled today implicates changes in the Ministry of Forests and cuts to the Ministry of Forests in creating increased hazards in the workplace. [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

Will the minister commit to looking at those cuts and those changes? For example, the report cites debris left by road builders and heavy logging machinery as a major cause of accidents involving fallers. That increased debris is a result of changes to the Forest and Range Practices Act. Changes to workers compensation have also caused fewer inspections and one-day warnings before inspections. [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

Mr. Speaker: Can the member put his question. [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

B. Simpson: Will the minister review those changes with a view towards increasing workplace safety? [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

[1450]

H077/ljg/1450

caused fewer inspections and one-day warnings before inspections. Will the minister review those changes with a view towards increasing work place safety? [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

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EXCEPTS ONLY

Hon. M. de Jong: Lest there be any doubt, we've got to examine all of the factors that people in the field are suggesting or contributing through the auspices of this report. If utilization rates in the woods are a factor, and certainly the report suggests that they might be, then we have to be prepared to examine that. I take great heart in the fact that the stakeholders themselves, and I emphasize to the member and I think he knows this in fairness, the report was funded by the council which the government set up. These numbers historically are atrocious. They're not getting any better. Last year ironically was the best year out of the last ten. This year is not. I think the commitment from all of the stakeholders and certainly from the government is to roll up our sleeves and get to work and change the trend. [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

[End of question period.]