

Victoria must take immediate action to curb forest deaths

Something is seriously wrong when workers in one of B.C.'s most important industries call their workplaces "death zones."

According to a forest industry report from the Western Fallers Association released last week, Workers Compensation Board safety rules are routinely ignored in the drive for greater revenue.

The result? So far this year, 27 forestry workers have died. And many of these deaths could have been prevented, had the regulations been adhered to.

There are numerous risks in logging, ranging from rock slides and heavy snowfalls to "selective harvesting" that leaves limbs hanging, ready to drop on workers.

But New Democrat MLA Corky Evans, himself a selective logger for two decades, says it would be wrong to blame the deaths on selective logging.

Evans told The Province that, when he began as a faller more than 30 years ago, he'd never work more than six-and-a-half hours in a day. Any longer, and you were too tired to operate safely.

These days, much of the falling is done by subcontractors intent on extracting as much timber as possible in a day. When it comes to work hours, the sky's the limit.

The consequence is the growing death rate.

Last week, responding to the report, Forests Minister Mike de Jong told the legislature that there is no need for more reviews.

He's promising to attack the problem head-on.

Said de Jong: "I think it's time for action."

We agree.