



BC Forest Safety

Safety is **good** business

2019 OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL REPORT

**EVERY FORESTRY WORKER
GOES HOME SAFE - EVERY DAY**



Photo: Richard Shultz



2019 BC Forest Safety Ombudsman Annual Report



Changing Times

This report is being prepared at a precedent setting time in history. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, for possibly the first time in modern history, the entire world is singularly focused on the health and well-being of the global population. For those who believed that money comes before safety, governments and industry across the globe have made a clear choice to put the safety of people ahead of fiscal priorities and the economy.

Two important considerations that have come out of this epidemic reinforce the core components of workplace safety.

1. We, as individuals, have a responsibility for our own safety, and
2. We have a responsibility for the safety of others ... a good example is social distancing.

The cross-over of workplace safety into the forest industry is best exemplified in how we approach *Phase Congestion*. Regardless of our role within a worksite, we all have a personal responsibility to protect ourselves; but equally, we are also responsible to ensure we are part of a larger team effort to protect all workers in the worksite. From the senior supervisor to the landing man, it is this universal responsibility and obligation to protect everyone that does not change, even after the pandemic subsides. So while this pandemic is a difficult situation to maneuver, one of its saving graces is that it will force us all to focus on how inter-connected we are and how our actions affect one another. In workplaces or public spaces, how we manage ourselves and our responsibilities to each other will help make our physical spaces safer in the future.

Year in Review

2019 was dominated by activities associated with three previous Ombudsman Reports; *No Longer The Road Less Travelled* (2008), *Helicopter Emergency Response* (2016) and *Phase Congestion Review* (2018).

An accident involving a charter bus with students from the University of Victoria on the Bamfield road brought a renewed focus to a key recommendation from the 2008 review, *No Longer the Road Less Travelled*, specifically calling for a new designation of highway for roads that were previously resource roads but now serve a greater public service role (health care, education, security, economic, etc.) to the communities connected to them. This recommendation was endorsed by the BC Forest Practices Board. The public attention gained from this 2008 report consumed our office as we engaged with media outlets, educational institutions, local governments, BC government and industry associations. The focus on the report's key issues and recommendations from 2008 remain as valid today as they were 11 years ago.

The follow-up work by the Coast Harvesting Advisory Group (CHAG) and WorkSafeBC in identifying Phase Congestion as a key priority for each group had our office working with both groups supporting their efforts to bring awareness to the issue and providing advice on specific strategies and the development of safety training materials.

The Helicopter Emergency Medical Service (HEMS) report continues to be a collaborative topic of conversation with industry, local and provincial governments, medical associations and transportation groups as well as our office in effort to improve helicopter emergency response within BC. We were invited to attend a number of events led by the BC Ministry of Health with group representation from First Nations, doctors, nurses, local government, educational institutions and industry to review the broader topic of delivering rural health care where transportation posed a challenge. Additionally, we were asked to brief provincial MLAs on the report. The ongoing interest in the HEMS report continues to validate both the issue and the need to find solutions for a reliable medical transportation system that currently is not providing equitable service for the forest sector or the public across the province.

Our office continued to participate on the Faller Technical Advisory Committee's quarterly meetings supporting the group's continued efforts to develop materials, information and review activities to improve falling safety.

We were also requested to undertake a preliminary review of third-party Safety Certification organizations (such as ISNet, ComplyWorks, etc.) and how they relate to the forest sector. While safety certification from these organizations has been standard practice in pre-qualifying project work for companies in the energy sector, their introduction to the forest sector is new. This is an ongoing review process and remains outstanding as we consider the next steps.

In 2019, we handled a number of individual enquiries including issues relating to log truck driver safety, danger-tree falling, sawmill safety, faller certification, resource road congestion and SAFE companies. We were able to direct some of these enquiries directly to the BCFSC or WorkSafeBC for resolution. Over the course of the year, those associated with HEMS and resource roads were rolled into our response to these topics.





Outreach

Once again, our office participated in the Truck Loggers Association and Western Forestry Contractors' Association AGM, the BC Rural Health Care - Linked Sectors Advisory Committee, as well with a few forums with provincial MLAs.

A Look Ahead at 2020

2020 will be a year of firsts. As social distancing and the suspension of economic activity has people focused on basic issues, it will be critical that as the forest industry restarts, workers will be able to shift their attention and focus from day-to-day challenges to the tasks-at-hand. The forest sector remains the most hazardous industry in BC. Although industry has made significant progress over the last decade in improving health and safety outcomes for workers and their families, it will require vigilant commitment at every level from CEO, supervisor, contractor and employee to ensure that we continue to see progress in safe work practices.

The year ahead will be different; in what way and how we adapt is yet to be determined. This office, like the rest of the world, will continue to monitor the events and will adjust as necessary to make sure that we continue to serve the forest industry and its members effectively.



About the BC Forest Safety Council

The **BC Forest Safety Council (BCFSC)** is the health and safety association for forest harvesting, sawmills, and pellet manufacturing in BC. The BCFSC works with forest sector employers, workers, unions, contractors and provincial agencies to support implementing changes necessary to eliminate fatalities and serious injuries in the forest sector.

Telephone (toll free): 1-877-741-1060

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Roger Harris

About the BC Forest Safety Ombudsman

The BC Forest Safety Ombudsman is part of the BC Forest Safety Council and is mandated to investigate safety concerns and provide recommendations for improvement.

The Office of the Forest Safety Ombudsman provides a safe, confidential environment for the discussion of issues and facilitates an impartial and timely resolution of concerns.

Contact

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The Forest Safety Ombudsman's Office will endeavour to return all contacts within five (5) working days.



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