



The goal: Making coastal logging safer

A new initiative to make B.C. coastal logging operations safer has been launched, and has the attention of the CEO's of the major companies operating on the Coast.

By Jim Stirling

Good ideas are transferable.

A group of forest company CEOs in British Columbia are putting that premise to the test as they seek to improve the safety of coast harvesting operations. The sector was chosen for attention by the CEOs after an evaluation of statistics compiled by the B.C. Forest Safety Council.

“About six or seven years ago, a lot of good work was done leading to a reduction in the numbers of (logging) fatalities, especially on the Coast,” explained Ken Higginbotham, spokesman for the CEO group. “As we got into 2012/13, we weren't doing too badly but the trend line appears to have flattened out. That was a real concern.”

With lumber markets improving and cubic metres harvested rising, there's increased pressure to move the wood from the Coast's rugged terrain.

“My understanding is the CEOs looked at the sawmill dust initiative. They liked the format. They liked the way it worked.”

The model that led to the development of a dust audit standard for wood processing plants saw the CEO group of 10 major forest companies overseeing technical committees with broad industry representation and participation to develop the audit standard. The CEOs took action after two separate sawmill explosions and fires killed four workers and injured dozens of others in the B.C. Interior early in 2012.

The Coast Harvesting Advisory Group (CHAG) was created comprising Interfor and Western Forest Products, along with large private forest land owners Island Timberlands and TimberWest, and the provincial government's B.C. Timber Sales. CHAG's technical task force includes representatives from those five groups along with Bob Matters from the Steelworkers and two logging contractor representatives, Blue Thunder Contracting and Mt. Sicker Contracting, selected by Dwight Yochim, executive director of the Truck Loggers Association.

CHAG's focus is on day-to-day logging operations and involves integrating safety improvement measures with other existing working groups. For example, the B.C. Forest Safety Council has been working on the certification of fallers and faller supervisors (bull buckers), said Higginbotham. The CHAG group is providing input to have all the bull buckers certified by December 2014. “It seems to be going well and all parties recognize the importance of it.”

What CHAG is terming “phase congestion” is getting attention. High elevations, steep slopes and weather conditions can create overlapping log harvesting operations in a given area, pointed out Higginbotham.



Different falling operations and road building activity (including blasting) often occur simultaneously. “There are significant numbers of people who don’t feel safe.” He said work on developing a plan of action for such circumstances was underway. “It is a challenge,” he agreed, but CHAG wants to find ways to make it work. Another issue under examination is how forest companies tackle the problem of dangerous tree removal. Some, for example, use trained tree blasters to diminish the hazards.

CHAG’s technical task force committees are also tackling the physical conditions of the loggers themselves. Under the umbrella heading “fit to fall”, a broad range of issues are open to consideration including the loggers’ fatigue, nutrition and hydration factors. Coastal logging contractors routinely clock long hours each day not just tackling the shifting realities on the work site but also getting to and from it.

Finding better ways of staying alert and able to safely carry out their demanding work is the paramount challenge

The SAFE company certification system is widespread throughout the forest industry’s log harvesting community. But there’s nothing in the way of auditing timber sales purchasers, noted Higginbotham. CHAG is looking at how it might tackle the issue. “I think we might see some significant changes over time,” he said.

The initial response to CHAG’s initiatives has been both positive and supportive, he reported. “There’s a genuine effort on the part of the coastal industry and all the CEOs in CHAG to make the forests safer.”

That slots directly into of CHAG’s long term goals. “We propose working on attracting people into the business—and one of the elements in attracting people is providing a safer work environment,” said Higginbotham.