



BC Forest Safety

NEWS RELEASE

Ombudsman reports serious gaps in access to helicopter emergency transport for rural workers

Calls on BC government to review current legislation and guarantee equal access for all BC residents

VICTORIA – Injured forestry workers in remote or rural parts of the province must wait – often for many hours – to access air ambulance, reports the BC Forest Safety Ombudsman in a report released today.

“Rural communities today are impacted twice compared to urban centres – first, in reduced access to medical care and again in reduced access to emergency medical transportation,” said BC Forest Safety Ombudsman Roger Harris. “For remote communities, as the distance to the nearest medical facility increases, the access to HEMS should be enhanced, not reduced.”

The report, *Will It Be There – A Report on Helicopter Emergency Medical Services in BC*, indicates that the serious gaps in the provision of emergency medical transport for workers in rural parts of the province threatens the medical outcomes of forestry workers – as well as residents – who have little to no guarantee to timely medical response in the event of an emergency. The current system falls short when compared to other jurisdictions such as Washington State or Alaska, with similar geography to BC, which have legislation to ensure that 99% of their population is within a 60-minute response time to a Level 3 trauma centre.

The report recommends that the provincial government: guarantee timelines for all residents to be able to access Trauma 3 Level care, similar to other jurisdictions; review the Emergency Health Services Act to allow for flexibility when it comes to expanding the scope of practice and role of First Responders in the transportation of accident victims; and expand the use of hoisting to reduce time to extract and transfer patients to medical facilities.

“There are no technical or infrastructure barriers to the delivery of air ambulance within that critical first hour to any resident of BC, regardless of where they live. The decision by government not to provide that access is a choice,” asserts Harris. “These recommendations support faster care for workers and all residents regardless of where you live in the province. Faster care results in better medical outcomes for the patient - which in turn, results in lower cost to the health care system.”

The full report is available on the BC Forest Safety Council website: www.bcforestsafe.org.

Harris was appointed Forest Safety Ombudsman more than 10 years ago by the BCFSC to be an impartial representative for forest safety issues. (See www.bcforestsafe.org/ombudsman.html.)

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 government agencies to support industry in implementing changes necessary to eliminate fatalities and serious injuries in the forest sector. Safety is good business. See www.bcforestsafe.org.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE REPORT AND TO SET UP AN INTERVIEW WITH ROGER HARRIS, PLEASE CONTACT:

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