

Safety Alert OF THE MONTH

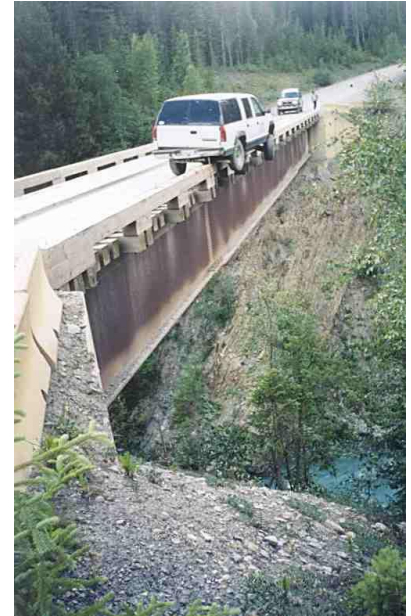
PLEASE PASS THIS ON TO PEOPLE AND ORGANIZATIONS IN BC'S FOREST INDUSTRY

September 2010

Crew Transportation: A Driving Concern

For many employers, crew transportation to and from forestry worksites is likely the most hazardous part of their operations. During the 2010 tree planting season, several silviculture companies experienced significant motor vehicle accidents. Each incident possessed significant potential for serious losses or fatalities. Some of the reported incidents included the following:

- A driver was using a mobile device while driving, and nearly drove into a ditch despite warnings from the passengers.
- A driver fell asleep with two passengers in the vehicle, and left the road on a corner. No serious injuries were suffered.
- While operating a full crew cab on the highway, the driver reached for the radio mike and failed to negotiate a curve. When the vehicle hit the soft shoulder the driver overcorrected and the truck rolled over. Several minor injuries occurred. That morning one of the passengers had experienced difficulty securing their seatbelt, but the driver had taken the time to correct the situation before departing. This action may have saved a life.



In each of the described situations, the companies investigated the incident and discovered weaknesses in their training programs and company policies. Although no critical injuries were reported, the circumstances of the incidents clearly indicate that fatalities may have been narrowly avoided. These situations clearly signal that there are important lessons about vehicle safety and driver training that must be acknowledged in order to prevent needless accidents. While this alert focuses on silviculture activities, the information and suggestions could help any forest industry employer avoid similar or more serious incidents.

By critically assessing your own driver training program and company practices you may help prevent accidents in your company and help save worker lives.

There are many important factors affecting vehicle and driver safety in forestry activities, and important challenges for companies as they train their employees and implement driving policies and practices.

- Because of the high employee turnover rate and heavy reliance upon younger workers in the silviculture industry, companies must have reliable driver selection and training programs.
- Driving requires focus and energy. The extreme physical nature of tree planting places significant demands on workers, and fatigue can impair the ability of a driver to respond effectively in emergency situations.
- The seasonal cycles of silviculture increases pressure to maintain production and finish contracts. Workers may feel rushed to begin their day, or be excited to end the day or season. These factors can influence their state of mind, and create distractions for drivers.

A summary of key recommendations from past incidents and tips on how to improve driver training is provided on the following page.

Tips for Employers and Drivers



- The end of a shift or contract, or the end of the work season, may be exciting as workers look forward to seeing their family and friends, but is also when fatigue and distractions may be highest. Drivers need to slow down and remain focused on doing their job in the safest manner possible.
- Drivers must not be distracted from their job. Companies should develop and enforce clear policies regarding all handheld devices. Research indicates that even hands-free cell phone conversations are distracting and significantly reduce reaction time if an incident occurs. Passengers must not distract drivers with loud music or excessive conversation.
- Radio mikes should be located in a position on the dash where it is easy for drivers to reach without looking for them, and without having to change their driving position.
- Radio communications must be kept short and to the point. Drivers should pull off the road at a safe location if they need to engage in longer discussions.
- Co-pilots can be designated to assist drivers with key tasks, such as changing channels on the radios. Co-pilots can also monitor driver performance to ensure they are not affected by fatigue.
- Seatbelts save lives. Drivers need to make sure everyone is belted up before the vehicle moves.
- Drivers must be monitored, and additional training provided when performance does not meet expectations. Companies should also adjust their policies and training in response to close calls, including incidents that occur elsewhere in the industry. Employers must also obtain annual driving abstracts for their drivers. Their previous record can often identify problem drivers.

Training Considerations

- Workers without experience driving crew vehicles on resource roads cannot be expected to learn on the job or by simply observing other drivers. Proper training consists of detailed education and instruction. Trainers and supervisors must observe and document drivers demonstrating their ability to operate a vehicle safely in resource road conditions.
- Company driver training programs should include instruction for drivers about fatigue and other forms of impairment, and how these factors can impact their driving abilities.
- Back-up drivers should always be trained in order to ensure that replacement drivers are available when primary drivers are away from work, or too tired to safely operate a vehicle.
- Whoever delivers driver training must be properly qualified to impart skills and knowledge to other employees. Trainers should have extensive experience driving on resource roads, and should ideally have completed a course specifically aimed at providing them with the ability to instruct and evaluate others in resource road driving.

Driver Training and Vehicle Safety Resources

With support from the BC Forest Safety Council, the Western Silvicultural Contractors' Association has developed a driver training course (Resource Road Light Truck Driver Training) specifically for the silviculture industry and its unique workforce. The course includes in-field demonstrations and competency assessments. Companies can have their own staff certified to provide this training in their own workplace. Information is available at wscacourses.ca or by contacting the WSCA at (604) 736-8660.



Additional information on vehicle safety in forestry and applicable regulations can be found through the BC Forest Safety Council Transportation webpage at bcforestsafe.org.

Although it may be several months until the next tree planting season starts, other forestry employers are entering the most challenging time of the year for driving. All company managers and supervisors should consider the risk to their drivers - shorter & darker days; rain, ice and snow, more wildlife on roads; etc. – and take appropriate steps to prepare and monitor all drivers and crews who will travel on resource roads for work.

