

Safety Alert OF THE MONTH

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

April 2020

Supervising Remote Workers

In order to remain operational during the COVID-19 pandemic, companies have had to adjust the way they do things. One example of this is requiring some workers to work remotely. While some operations have always had remote workers, such as truck drivers or equipment operators, this may be new for some. Remote work can be an effective means of supporting COVID-19 prevention measures but it can also present challenges to ensuring safe work and adequate supervision. This safety alert will provide some considerations for supervising remote employees.

Know when it is Appropriate

Working remotely is not suitable for all workers. For example, new and young workers should generally not work remotely. These workers are at higher risk of injury while on the job due to inexperience and they may not have higher levels of required training, understanding and preparation of more experienced workers. They are also less likely to ask questions. New and young workers require closer supervision to ensure that they gain the necessary training, understanding and experience in the workplace to keep them safe on the job.

Safe Work Procedures

Make sure that your Safe Work Procedures (SWP) for working alone and in isolation are updated and reviewed with the remote workers. This should occur as soon as a job assignment changes. The SWP should outline how communication will occur, what equipment is required, what the check-in schedule will be, provide contact information for both the worker and designated contact person, and what to do in the event that the worker fails to check in or there is an incident.

If you do not have a procedure for this, the BC Forest Safety Council (BCFSC) has a template that can provide you with a good starting point (see below).



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Communication

Set expectations early and clearly. In many cases, workers will need clear direction about their assigned work. This may be new to many people and they will need support getting situated. Expectations should be clearly defined in terms of check-ins, updates and workload. While communication is important in all work situations, extra effort is required when remote workers are involved.

Schedule regular check-in times and take the time to engage workers both professionally and personally. Remote workers should feel connected. Over communication is better than not communicating enough. Ensure they are included in safety talks and are able to access information they require to perform their roles safely.

Be Flexible

Supervising remote workers is not the same as supervising local workers. It can be challenging and may take some time for both of you to adjust to the new working situation. However, if done well, remote workers can be an effective part of the team. They can have longer-term, positive impacts to your company including increased employee empowerment, lower costs, improved employee retention and reduced travel times.

Additional Resources

- Working Alone or in Isolation Safe Work Procedure Template - www.bcforestsafe.org/files/swp_xWorkingAloneOrInIsolationSafeWorkProcedureAndChecklist.doc
- Working from Home: Considerations for Employers - www.bcforestsafe.org/files/BCFSCWorkingFromHomeEmployersChecklist.pdf
- Working from Home Tips and Best Practices for Employees - www.bcforestsafe.org/files/BCFSCWorkingFromHomeEmployeeTips.pdf

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