

# Safety Alert OF THE MONTH

February 2011

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

## Slips, Trips & Falls in the Woods

It was a routine top up of fluids. The crews had been going hard and were nearing the end of a shift and the end of the week. At 3:30am the Skidder operator readied himself to face the cold, he was tired from the pace of the week and the -30C weather was an unwelcome companion as he grabbed a can of hydraulic fluid and stepped out of the warm cab.



The Skidder had plenty of handholds and, with 10 + years of experience, the operator was careful to maintain 3 points of contact as he hauled himself up the machine. When the maintenance was completed, he climbed back down. As he took the last step down onto the blade he turned and released his hand hold. There was very little traction on the last step and in an instant, his feet came out from underneath and he fell backwards, striking his back on the lowered blade and breaking several ribs. A processor operator working nearby witnessed the fall and alerted the rest of the crew for help.

*Everyone wipes out now and then...  
Those clumsy guys are the only ones who have any injuries...  
It's the bush, falling is a fact of life out here!*

### Sound familiar?

Working in forestry means walking over uneven terrain, climbing onto to slash or equipment and having to manage with difficult weather and footing.

There are a number of ways you can get tripped up out there, but a slip, trip or fall has the potential to send you straight to the couch or worse, end a career.

### Can you afford to ignore the problem?

## Understanding Slips, Trips and Falls

Slips, trips and falls (STFs) are the **second most common injury** in the workplace. Most of us in forestry don't consider them a big deal when compared to the dangers posed by equipment, resource road driving or wildlife encounters. And yet, many of us rely on strong backs, knees and ankles to keep us working in the woods. A seemingly 'minor' incident can have heavy consequences if it means long-term damage to our bodies and our ability to make a living.

**Slips** happen with poor traction on the walking surface whether caused by uneven footing, ice or snow or wet/oily spills. **Trips** occur when you catch your foot on an object and lose your balance and are generally caused by uneven walking surfaces, poor lighting or housekeeping and obstructed views. A **fall** can happen from height or from the same level whether climbing in and out of a truck or piece of equipment or stepping off of slashy debris on a cutblock.



As with any incident, there are often a variety of contributing factors, many of which seem inconsequential when they occur on their own.

However, a few seemingly 'small' factors together can create the right set of events for a serious injury.



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For example, a healthy and fit equipment operator may have little chance of a STF injury when climbing up into their machine in summer weather when they are unrushed. However, being out of shape, distracted, hurried, in rain/snow/night conditions will all add a greater degree of risk of injury.

*How many times were you hurried or did your mind wander out in the woods today day?*

## What can workers do?

- Report hazards  
This doesn't mean even last snowflake that falls or every bit of blowdown you have to step over! What we want to start thinking of is if this is an on-going issue how can it be resolved or minimized to make things a little bit safer given the conditions?
- Be physically prepared  
Working in forestry is physically demanding. Walking through the bush, driving or operating equipment for long hours or throwing wrappers to secure a load all exert strain on the body. Injury prevention starts with preparing your body for the types of demands you face at work.
- Be aware  
Know how small interruptions to the daily routine can impact judgment, balance, coordination and attention. These interruptions are an everyday part of work; being aware of how they may affect you can minimize your chances of a tweaked knee, rolled ankle or worse.

## What can management do?

- Conduct a risk assessment of the types of hazards your workers face  
Do your equipment operators climb on and off of equipment that may be icy or slippery from mud or snow? Does your layout crew have to traverse through heavy slash or on mountainous terrain? Is the shop floor continually covered with oil spills? Once you understand the type of hazards that exists on the job site, it's easier to address them.
- Eliminate the hazards that are within your control.  
Sweat the small stuff so you don't have to sweat the big stuff. Try to eliminate exposure by making small changes to the way you conduct work. For example, a company noticing a number of reports that a hot air exhaust point is melting snow and creating an icy patch near a doorway may want to affix a hood to the vent or adjust the walkway to approach from another angle. Once you have identified hazards ask yourself if there is any way to get rid of it.
- Make sure workers are trained and understand the hazards  
Set up your crews to successfully avoid slip, trip and fall injuries. Make sure they fully understand the hazards and how to avoid injury. 'Common sense' takes training!



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## Considerations for reducing Slips, Trips, Falls – Workers

Am I physically fit enough for my Work?	What extra precautions should I take?	Physical fitness – strength, flexibility and balance training may help reduce severity of STF injuries
Am I distracted? Tired? Hungry? Hurried?		All of these items effected cognitive functioning - your mind doesn't work the way it 'usually' does when tired, hungry or distracted – which may mean your physical response to correcting a slip or fall is diminished.
Am I wearing the right PPE/ have the right equipment?		Proper footwear or accessories (see the January Innovation Alert) can reduce likelihood of a slip or trip.
Am I following Safe Work Procedures?	Why not?	<p>Company policies and procedures are in place to keep you safe. You are responsible for making the safe decision to follow safe work procedures on the job.</p> <p>Bring it up with management or your Joint Health &amp; Safety Committee If you find the way you do your work makes it difficult to follow the SWP. The procedure may need to be adapted for changing work conditions or equipment use.</p>

**Top 3 body part injuries for Forestry workers:**

**Back ◦ Knee ◦ Ankle, Toes & Feet**



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## Considerations for reducing Slips, Trips, Falls – Management

Has a risk assessment been done?	Do you know what hazards your workers face each day?	Are you aware of the changing risks when conditions change?
Have we attempted to remove the hazards?	If we can't remove them, is everyone aware of the hazard?	If we can't remove them, does the crew have the ability to deal with the hazards effectively?
Are there proper handholds and railings? Are they in the right place for the task?	Can the manufacturer provide modifications for equipment? Can the company make modifications?	If not, are there other ways to reduce exposure to the hazard?
Do I know where I am sending my crew and what the conditions there are?	Weather, timber type, terrain variability and type of work being completed should be considered	Pre-work planning, on-going risk assessments and adequate supervisor
Is my crew wearing the right type of footwear and have the right PPE for the conditions?	Do you have a clear policy on PPE requirements and use?	Will the company provide PPE? Are supervisors leading by example?

### Additional Resources:

BCFSC - [RADAR awareness campaign](#)

[Back Care](#)

[Hazard Assessment Checklist](#)

[Preventing Slips, Trips, Falls](#)

[Humorous WorkSafe BC video](#) on Slips, Trips and Falls

[Foot comfort and care](#)

[Forestry specific injury rates](#)

