

Certification deadline looms

UNTIL recently, the profession of falling trees has been unregulated in B.C. That means any knothead with a chainsaw and opposable thumbs can wander into the bush and cut down trees.

As you're reading this, things are changing, we think, for the better. A test for existing fallers, devised by the WCB, started earlier this year. By next year at this time, a full-fledged 30-day course will be used to train anybody who wants to take a chainsaw to a tree. Soon a person won't be able to fall trees in B.C. without that course.

Thirty days away from work does take a hefty bite out of paycheques, but there is a way the course can be avoided. Until March 31, 2005, fallers can register with the WCB to take a test (or as they call it, an "evaluation") for \$150. If a faller takes the test, he's saying he's got the skills to stay in the bush without needing to take a course. The test is the WCB saying, "prove it."

If you think it's a money grab and don't want to shell out the money for the evaluation, you should know the cost will be bumped up to \$250 on April 1, 2005. After that, the price gets jacked up even further, to \$600.

While it's not great that guys in the bush have to open their wallets to show the WCB they know how to do their job, it's really for a good cause. Fallers certification makes the bush a little bit safer. On top of that, a bureaucrat who doesn't know the difference between a red cedar and a Douglas fir won't test

you. The guys issuing the test in the field are fellow fallers, who took their own test to become qualified supervisors/trainers (QS/T).

The "evaluation" is split into a written section and a practical part in the field. Rod Hayes, a 43 year-old faller from Rosswood, took the written part on Aug. 24 and the practical on Aug. 26.

Basically, says Hayes, a 50-question multiple choice test evaluated his knowledge on falling. Then he was sent out to the bush, where he spent a few hours making stumps.

The test also marks the faller based on protective equipment, safe work site procedures and chainsaw operation. Hayes says he wasn't really nervous, and scored 93 out of 100 for the whole thing.

The man who evaluated Hayes was Dominic Gagnon, a 47 year-old faller from Terrace. To become a QS/T, Gagnon took a course back in May of this year, five days in the classroom and five days in the field. In class, he says he learned about the legal mumbo-jumbo, and in the field, two guys from the WCB showed the class how to evaluate other fallers.

When Gagnon is looking at a stump the faller has just cut down, he's looking for the right depth in the undercut, the right opening for the undercut and making sure the backcut is higher than the undercut so the butt doesn't slide asswards. Then, he makes some fancy markings in the stump, grading it on a scale of 15 points, which is a perfect cut. A 12, he says, is the acceptable level.



Dominic Gagnon, a qualified supervisor-trainer, evaluates a tree stump cut down by fellow faller Rod Hayes.

Photo by John Mystrhal

Before any of that happens, though, the QS/T reads out what those acceptable standards are and tells the guy they're evaluating what they're looking for. Gagnon says none of the guys he's evaluated have failed.

As of mid-September, Gagnon says he's evaluated around 25-30 guys.

Mike Nielson, the man at the WCB who's heading the certification process, says around 2,500 fallers have been registered with over 700 certified. He said that back in mid-September, adding that 15-18 fallers are being certified each day.

Nielson said he hopes to have everyone who registered certified by July 31, 2005. "There will be a consistent level of training throughout the province," he says.

But just who's doing that training is unknown, since this thing is still in the developmental stage. Nielson says the WCB won't be providing the training, but rather sending the training package off to whoever wants it. He envisions it going off to companies, community colleges and existing faller-training facilities.

At any rate, sometime in the future, guys won't just need thumbs and a chainsaw

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Overview from the Chair

by Mike McKibbin, Chairman



The Western Fallers Association (WFA) is acknowledging its second anniversary of incorporation in the province of B.C. by sending out this blanket newsletter. If you're wondering how this reached you, we obtained WCB's mailing list for the "Manual Tree Fallers" classification unit. We told our existing membership that we would obtain professional help with the publication of our newsletters, and this is the first one.

For those of you who are new to the independent- contract falling community or not a member already, we hope you'll find this publication interesting enough that you will join us, since one of the main gists of this newsletter is that we're on our annual membership campaign. You'll find a registration form inside.

For those of you who don't know how the WFA came into being, here's a brief summary.

In the year 2000, if you were registered with WCB as a "Manual Tree Faller," your assessment rates were about to skyrocket, putting a lot of you in the poor house or making it virtually impossible for a new faller to start a company. This was not right. Initial meetings were set up with WCB and Industry reps to discuss this matter. The WFA was spawned to give us a political voice at the meetings.

Well, after two years of those meetings, a lot of lobbying by us throughout the Forest Industry and countless submissions, the rates were reversed, taking approximately \$10 million of assessments off the shoulders of the fallers and putting it back on industry, where it belonged.

The WFA has been and continues to be involved in the "fallers certification" project, which has been changed around almost weekly. While I know this has pissed off a lot of you guys, our Board concluded that a lot of good could come out of it and that we should stand behind it. Quite frankly, myself and a few others

Lucky the Logger



Cartoon by Werner Still

on our Board would have liked to have seen the project a whole lot more hard core. Fallers have been unmonitored for the last 20 years and Industry, in a lot of cases, was taking full advantage. There had to be some recognized professionalism brought back into our livelihood, and this certification program appears to be something that will help do that.

I know there are a couple of QS/Ts out there that probably shouldn't be seeing you, but we're currently trying to deal with that. On the other hand, there are some credible QS/Ts, too. When they get to you, step up to the plate, conduct yourself in a professional manner and don't jack these guys around!

One of the best-kept secrets in the province is the forming of the B.C. Forest Safety Council (page three). The WFA was one of the founding organizations of this group, made up of the highest

representation of the Forest Industry. Right at the top of their list of things to do is see the fallers certification program carried through to a successful completion. There's a lot riding on this for them, as part of their big picture is to certify all people working in the bush and the companies that we're working for. In short, the fallers' project is a pilot for what's up and coming. The forming of this group made part of the WFA's constitution a whole lot easier to fulfill.

On a closing note, the WFA is about fallers being able to voice their concerns back to Industry. Fallers get caught up right in the middle of situations that are out of their hands but are repeatedly expected to deal with them. There is inconsiderate management out there when it comes to our well-being, helicopters, yarders and skidders working

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Heads Up - Newsletter of the Western Fallers Association

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"Mysterious" report boosts safety

EVERY 10 years or so, it seems the government wants voters to think it's doing something with its time, so they write a report about safety in the forest. And then, in the true Canadian political tradition, nothing gets done.

Once again, a report has been written, this one titled "A Report and Action Plan to Eliminate Deaths and Serious Injuries in British Columbia's Forest." Released in January, this page-turner has remained somewhat of a mystery to the general public, but it looks like something will actually happen this time.

The report was written by the Task Force on Forest Safety, created by the WCB at the request of the provincial ministry of labour.

After the report was written, an implementation team set up the brand-new B.C. Forest Safety Council, which is in charge of putting the report's 20 recommendations into practice. The council gets financial backing from \$500,000 of your WCB money.

Tanner Elton, the man who's been involved in the whole process from the get-go, is the director of the safety council for the time being. He admits no one can be faulted with having skepticism, since similar reports have been written before. But, and this is a big "but," Elton says those past reports have never resulted in a council being formed before.

On top of that, Elton says other reports were done regionally and with only a few players involved. This time, he says the whole sector across the province is involved, from the companies to the unions to the fallers to...yes, even the tree-planters.

"The council is an organization of organizations," says Elton. On top of that, the man at the top of this thing is head of the biggest forestry company in B.C. That's Jim Shepherd, the chief executive officer and president of Canfor, who's also the chair of the council. So, there's financial backing from the WCB and there's support from industry. It'll take a lot for this thing to fail.

"According to the report, 250 loggers died in the last 10 years."

The one organization that won't have representation at the table of the council, which meets four times a year, is the province, because, as Elton puts it, you don't want someone at the table you might criticize or lobby.

The big reason for the report and subsequent council is because, as Elton puts it, safety isn't as "top of mind" as it should be. According to the report, 250 loggers died in the last 10 years, an average of 25 a year. While the task force was bashing out the report from August to December of 2003, three deaths were reported from the bush. Added to those tragedies are the countless injuries sustained out there.

The report states: "Deaths and serious injuries in the forest sector have become socially acceptable; this must change." That, says Elton, is the most challenging part of the council's job — to change that attitude.

Besides adjusting attitude, there are two other themes Elton says run through the report's recommendations. One is creating a certified work force, part of which is happening now as the fallers and buckers write their tests (see page one). The other is to have qualified companies with safety programs.

Over the next six months, the council will be putting together its plan for the next five years.

Elton also emphasized that the B.C. Forestry Safety Council belongs to the sector: it was created by the forest sector; it's funded by the forest sector. And he added the WCB wouldn't be funding it if it weren't for the full support of the forestry industry.

Elton says the council doesn't have a great deal of power. But, since it's run by forestry, it can definitely influence the way companies and workers act out there in the bush. Government legislation is part of the overall goal, he says, but for now they're just keeping an eye on the province's agenda.

In the end, the report says if the "action plan" is put into play, about 25 lives will be saved and 92 injuries will be averted each year. The report is pragmatic, because it says what's printed on the paper doesn't matter. "It's what is done with this Report that matters," states the "executive summary."

In other words, if the stuff in the report is put into practice, another won't need to be written in another 10 years.

If you're not getting much sleep lately, and you're plugged in, you can read the report at www.forestsafetybc.com.

WFA BOARD

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Profile of the Board

Mack Schat Jr.

Secretary/Treasurer



MACK Schat Jr. has sat on the WFA board for the last year and a half now, but he wasn't too interested in it when it was first starting up. He says it wasn't until chair Mike McKibbin met with him and he realized the organization was predominantly about safety that he started taking it seriously.

Safety's a good cause, says Schat, who's been beaten by two trees. One rebounded off a few snags and squished his leg, which put him out of action for five years.

Besides that interlude, 44 year-old Schat has been falling since he was 19. At first, he was attracted to the macho part of the job, not to mention the money. "Falling just attracted me," he says. "The power of knocking timber down."

Now, it feeds his family of a wife, three sons and two daughters.

"Safety is a good cause," says Schat, who sees the job of the WFA to make people more aware that there's an organization out there that's for the fallers, and make sure the bosses know that their employees can't be pushed around. A realist, Schat says the bush will never be made safer because of the pressure from companies to get the trees down fast.

This is the first in a series of profiles of the WFA board, to let you know who's out there fighting for a safer workplace.

DATES TO REMEMBER

DECEMBER 31, 2004

Deadline to register for certification test @ \$150.

JANUARY 15, 2005

WFA Annual General Meeting

JULY 31, 2005

Certification deadline.

WAR WOUNDS

Sudden Paralysis



Jim Savard pictured with wife, Valarie.

Photo by Chris Armstrong

ON June 28, 2001, faller Jim Savard remembers going to work, but by lunchtime he was being flown to Vancouver General Hospital. A tree had fallen and hit him so hard it blew his fifth vertebrae into little pieces, leaving him paralyzed from the chest down.

"I don't remember losing consciousness," recalls Savard, "but on the other hand I don't remember much of that day."

Jim does remember going to work that day. His car quit three times on the way to work, so he parked it and got a ride with someone else. "Maybe the big guy upstairs was trying to tell me to stay home, since after the accident the vehicle ran fine," says Savard.

After the accident and the surgery, Jim started his recovery by spending two

weeks in Vancouver General Hospital and was then well enough to be moved to GF Strong to start his rehabilitation. He was only there for one day and was returned to VGH because he had developed a condition that affects the muscles, called Guillain Barré Syndrome. This condition affects one per cent of patients who have undergone major trauma.

All of his muscles were weakened to the point where he had to be put on a respirator for a month. It was tough and go for a while but with a lot of prayer he pulled through and managed to keep his spirits up.

Due to the added challenge this syndrome created, it was a long hard road to recovery but he was determined to regain his strength.

He couldn't lift three pounds at the start of his therapy but he can now lift 60 pounds. You can't measure determination.

A sudden injury such as this puts a strain on not only the victim, but also the whole family, both financially and emotionally. It requires a lot of changes in the way things are done, a slower pace of life and patience. A positive attitude and a sense of humor also help.

A curly-haired broad-shouldered man with an upbeat manner, Savard says his paralysis initially bothered him, as it would anyone who has his ability to walk suddenly taken from him. But he still manages to crack jokes.

"A guy's gotta be in good spirits," says Savard, "otherwise you'd be all by yourself."

- Submitted

Message from the Chair...continued from page 1

too close to us, wacky quality control guys asking us to do the impossible, condemning us when we won't.

We are working for you to bring these areas of concern to the forefront and have them resolved in a sensible manner with the faller in mind. In the wide world of politics, which is what's running the whole damn show, the more people on board, the louder the voice.

I hope you enjoyed your copy of this newsletter. If you want to keep them coming, join us!

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

Western Fallers Association



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No. 1 worldwide



Word in the bush is that some guys are having trouble with their chainsaws seizing up in the middle of a cut. Since this could be considered a tad expensive and possibly dangerous, we contacted Derek Chandler, the technical manager of Stihl Ltd. He's been there for five years and has worked around chainsaws in one form or another since 1989. Below are his thoughts.

Fill it with premium

THE dangers of seized chainsaw engines, in some cases, can be traced to its fuel. Since 1998, chainsaw engines have changed to adapt to regulations set forth by the American Environmental Protection Agency (the Canadian Environmental Protection Agency developed similar guidelines here). Basically, the regulations have meant that chainsaws run faster but less fuel mixture reaches the engine. This lowers emissions and limits environmental damage. It also means a higher octane is required to avoid heat build-up.

All manufacturers must abide by these regulations. If engine failures occur due to the use of poor fuel and oil, it is not considered a warranty-related failure. Because manufacturers can't control what fuel the user puts in his chainsaw, engine seizures based on bad gas and oil aren't under warranty.

Since all two-stroke chainsaw engines receive their lubrication through the oil that is mixed with the fuel, it is very important to be certain the quality of both the fuel and mix oil you choose is of a high standard.

For gas, most manufacturers recommend a minimum octane rating of 89 octane or higher. The higher the octane rating, the more resistance it has to pre-ignition. Any fuel below the 87 octane level will pre-ignite and once pre-ignition occurs due to the poor grade of fuel, the engine exhaust temperatures will increase above what the oil viscosity can withstand, causing piston and cylinder scoring. This results in engine failure and costly repairs.

Also, avoid using 10 per cent Ethanol-based fuels because it burns with 43 per cent less energy than gasoline and without a richer carburetor adjustment, the engine will run lean and damage to the piston and cylinder will occur.

As for oil, the recommended rating for the air cooled two-stroke engine is "TC" and should be of a premium standard by a recognized oil manufacturer. Oil is the main defence against costly engine failure, so if the recommended oil is a little more expensive than generic oils, it is more than worth the additional cost. Contrary to rumours in the field, all oils are not the same.

An increase in engine failures has happened over the past years when "pre-batch" fuel is being supplied to the various logging camps. Usually the grade of both the fuel and oil is below what is recommended by the manufacturer and is the cause for many of the failures.

Derek Chandler can be reached at 1-800-572-4794, extension 5503 or drop him an e-mail at derek.chandler@stihl.ca.



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 RICHARD BUTLER - PRESIDENT

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to work at one of the most dangerous jobs on the globe. To make it safe and to save money, get registered before March 31, 2005.

One last thing: if you register and don't make your appointment for the test, you've done two things. One, you've screwed the QS/T, who's taken the time off to give you the test. Two, you've screwed yourself, because the cost to re-register is another \$150. If you can't make your appointment, please call the QS/T to cancel ahead of time to make everyone happy.

As of July 31, 2005, if your name isn't on the docket for certification, WCB officers could write up orders to you, or the licensee or prime contractor you're working for.

The WCB also wants everyone registered for the test by July 31, 2005. A few stragglers aside, they hope to have everyone certified by that date. After that, if you're not certified, WCB will tell you to put down your saw and go home.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Heads Up welcomes comments from men on the saw. If you've got a comment or complaint, drop us a line at [dmckibbin@mon](mailto:dmckibbin@monarch.net)