



TACKLING THE ISSUE OF PHASE CONGESTION

In 2018, WorkSafeBC launched a comprehensive three-year forestry high-risk prevention strategy to address workplace safety at forestry operations, focusing on those areas of the timber harvesting segment that represent exceptional risk to workers.

As part of the strategy, an additional focus initiated in 2019 has been on phase integration, which is the practice of incorporating multiple harvesting phases within a single operating area. Within that operating area, there might be a single contractor with multiple phases or multiple contractors working at the same time. Without proper planning, effective communication, and active management and qualified supervision, these areas can become overcrowded or jammed, leading to phase congestion.

Phase congestion is an industry-wide problem and has resulted in serious injuries and fatalities, contributing to a higher injury rate compared to many other sectors in BC. Last year, the forestry sector's injury rate was 4.6 claims per 100 workers compared with the province-wide rate of 2.19. In 2018, there were 789 claims, 23 per cent of which were serious injury claims.

Phase congestion has been an issue that the industry has struggled with for some time. The early dilemma had operators focusing on the phase congestion itself, when the focus should have been on the problem and factors that led to phase congestion in the first place.

To help address the issue of phase congestion, WorkSafeBC developed a new resource—"Forestry phase integration:

A conversation guide for officers." The guide helps our Forestry Prevention Officers better educate the forest industry on the difference between safe phase integration and phase congestion through a risk-based approach.

During inspections of forestry operations, WorkSafeBC Forestry Prevention Officers are ensuring that employers and prime contractors understand the high level of risk of an incident occurring as a result of phase congestion. To help identify and assess those risks, a simple questionnaire has been developed for our officers to use during inspections and share with employers.

The conversation guide includes questions around the phases that are operating in the block, whether the employer or prime contractor understands

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(*self-reported in recent surveys of log truck drivers by the BCFSC.)

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the difference between phase integration and phase congestion, whether challenges or threats have been identified that affect the interaction of phases, and what controls—including critical controls—are in place to avoid phase congestion. It also covers the assigned responsibility of who is responsible for the controls and critical controls.

The guide also includes a phase congestion matrix that outlines examples of potential hazards and risks, as well as controls and critical controls associated with various phases.

The guide is designed to help operators come to understand how phase congestion occurs; as various elements of operations are brought together, greater risks and threats are introduced, and ultimately additional controls are needed to ensure it doesn't become problematic.

A key goal of the guide is to ensure that employers and prime contractors at forestry operations have the proper operational controls in place to mitigate the risk of injury to workers.

Data collected from the conversation guide over the next two years will be used by WorkSafeBC to develop other potential resources to help the industry manage phase integration more effectively.

It is important to note that WorkSafeBC did not develop this conversation guide in isolation. Consultation was a key part of its development.

A draft of the guide was prepared at the end of 2018. In early 2019, a pilot team of Forestry Prevention Officers was trained on its use and completed 34 field tests of the resource while conducting high-risk strategy inspections.

A final version of the guide was completed in May 2019 after incorporating feedback from the pilot team, as well as from WorkSafeBC's Forest Industry Advisory Group, BC Forest Safety, employers and contractors. Following training of all Forestry Prevention Officers, it was deployed for field use in July.

So far, industry reaction to the conversation guide has been very positive, with some industry groups, including

the Coast Harvest Advisory Group, looking at parallel initiatives. This is important, because it will require all of us working together in this sector to address this critical issue.

Forestry High Risk Strategy

WorkSafeBC's Forestry High Risk Strategy targets the highest-risk activities in harvesting: manual tree falling, log transportation, cable-yarding operations, mechanized harvesting including tethered-equipment operations, and silviculture. The strategy is designed to reduce the serious-injury rate through inspections that may include consultation with workers and employers, as well as education.▲

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Is safe phase integration part of your harvest plan?

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