

HOW DANGEROUS IS SILVICULTURE?

A rash of tragedies in the past season highlights the need for improved safety in silviculture operations.

The statistics are nothing short of grim: Seven young tree planters killed on the way to a planting camp in Alberta...four others killed as they were leaving a camp near Prince George, BC. That in the space of two weeks earlier this year.

It roughly translates into one death per thousand among western Canada's tree planters — figures which in any industry would be considered staggering.

These events and others have focused a great deal of attention on the issue of safety in the tree-planting industry. Not only has safety become a major issue among the contractors and the forestry giants who still do their own planting, but it is getting to be an issue among the planters themselves.

But is tree planting really as dangerous as the figures make it out to be?

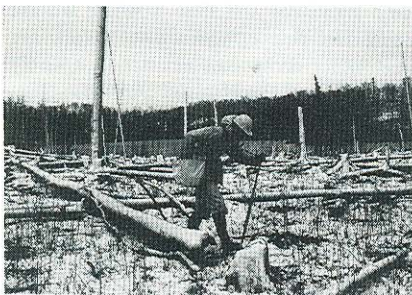
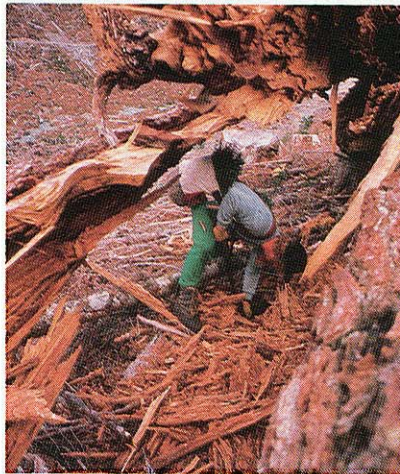
The answer apparently is yes, and no. It is a dangerous job, but it doesn't have to be. Regulations exist in almost all cases to govern safety in and around planting camps, but although the rules might be in place, without adequate enforcement they quickly become meaningless.

According to Dirk Brinkman, president of Brinkman & Associates Reforestation Limited, which employs around 800 planters in western Canada each summer, the accidents in BC and Alberta are of national scope because so many people were affected by the tragedy.

"It's tragic that it took so many deaths for people to realize that planters face numerous dangers every day they are on the job."

As president of the Canadian Silviculture Association, Brinkman has publicly demanded that logging companies be forced to include regulations about safety standards and road-worthiness of the motor vehicles used by planters. He has also demanded planter training in the event of bear attacks, minimum requirements for camp hygiene and herbicide and pesticide notification for all contracts being let out.

More important though, he said, prime contractors—the companies or individuals who are ultimately responsible for planting

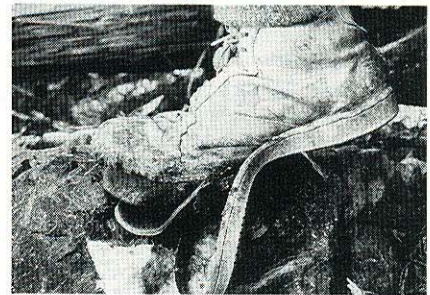


Severe slash conditions, which make work more difficult for the tree planters, are not uncommon in BC.

the trees — must be responsible for enforcing these regulations.

After traffic accidents and vehicular hazards, Brinkman said the next biggest safety concern for planters, more so those in western Canada, is attacks by bears. One BC planter was killed by a bear in 1986, while another was killed by a bear in Alberta in 1988. In 1990, one planter in BC was mauled by a bear.

Surprisingly, injuries caused by equipment, or injuries caused during actual planting do not rank as highly as might be expected.



Planters must wear appropriate footwear. Planters for the E.B. Eddy Co. in Espanola, Ont., can purchase new footwear from the company and have the cost deducted from their paycheques.

"The tool when it's lying on the ground isn't dangerous. It only becomes dangerous when somebody starts to use it and then the worker has a chance to hurt himself," said Grant Brodeur, president of Broland Enterprises Inc., based in Toronto.

"If they get something caught in the blade of their thinning saw, they are supposed to turn the saw off to remove it. But when they are getting paid by the hectare, they are not likely to slow down to remove whatever was caught in the blade."

Contractors should also have somebody trained in emergency first aid, Brinkman said, noting that BC's regulations in terms of first aid training are currently the toughest in Canada. Brinkman's company employs at least one and sometimes two licensed first aid attendants who have taken two-week training courses in industrial first aid.

Brinkman's attendants typically work as a cook or as a part-time planter although they are paid full-time first aid attendant rates, he explained.

Also, Brinkman said his attendants teach preventive first aid by showing planters how to avoid ailments like tendinitis in the wrist

which is the most commonly treated ailment in the bush.

Craig Boddy, forest management supervisor with E.B. Eddy Company, based in Espanola, Ont, said slips and falls are common mishaps in the bush but a lot of those can be prevented if the planter is wearing suitable footwear.

E.B. Eddy demands that planters wear safety boots with "deep lug" soles. Those who do not have adequate footwear can purchase approved boots from the company, with payment deducted from their paycheques.

Establishing standards for camp hygiene has long been a sore spot for Brinkman. However, he added that in this area the CSA has the support of the health ministries but it is the department of forests which is dragging its feet.

Brinkman's hit-list also covers the herbicides and pesticides which are used on the seedlings or in areas where planting is being carried out.

"I've been fighting for this for 11 years now. All we want is notification so we can take precautions or so we can make a decision about how we do the work," Brinkman said.

"We have to know if there are long-term consequences from working around treated seedlings or from taking our water from run-offs where the area has been sprayed."

Brinkman said there is a good chance Alberta's occupational health and safety ministry as well as the Workers' Compensation Board will implement the silviculture safety regulations as they apply to transportation, pesticides and camp hygiene.

In BC, however, safety in general seems to have taken a turn for the worse since 1987 when replanting became the responsibility of the forestry industry. As Brinkman explained, prior to 1987 contracts issued by logging companies had to conform with those issued by the Ministry of Forests in order to qualify for government planting subsidies. However, now that logging companies do the planting at their own expense, "they are not required to enforce the camp



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standards or anything like it. They are using old contracts that don't include mention of camp standards and that is where we are seeing the deterioration. Contractors are planting for companies who are completely independent of the Ministry and those companies are concerned only with cost and not with methods. That's where we have the deterioration.

"In our industry we know that the only person present who has the power to enforce those standards is the contract checker: the

Ministry of Forests, or the forest industry representative, who can threaten to shut the contract down unless the basic standards are complied with," Brinkman said.

"Logging companies should be taking the responsibility for camp standards."

Brinkman added that due to the nomadic nature of the camps — the average camp lasts just 15-17 days in one place — and the fact that there are so many of them, any regulations are difficult, if not impossible to police.

But is the picture really as bad as Brinkman makes it out to be?

According to Simon Landy, president of New Forest Contractors Inc. of Toronto, the industry's safety record is "not that bad" and increased legislation is not the best way to clean up weak areas.

To put restrictions on who can drive a vehicle does not make sense except in the context of the (Ontario) Highway Traffic Act, Landy said.

"We have had a lot of experience with drivers on the road and the number one cause of accidents is driver error or inexperience. All the regulations proposed here (regarding safety features built into the planter's vehicles) would not have made any difference to the accidents in BC and Alberta."

Contrary to what many people think, the vehicles used in most planting operations are not old and beat up, but are leased and are usually fairly new. Therefore mechanical failure in the vehicles is not a major concern, he said.

Landy also said that existing laws from the Workers' Compensation Boards and occupational health and safety watchdogs already cover safety equipment that is needed in planters' vehicles.

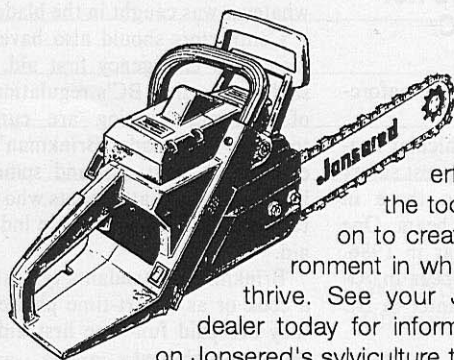
"I feel strongly about camp hygiene too," Landy said, noting that Schedule 4 contained in the standard BC Ministry contract is two pages long and outlines everything from the temperature of water used to wash dishes to the required ratio of planters to privies.

Brinkman said, however, that the Minis-

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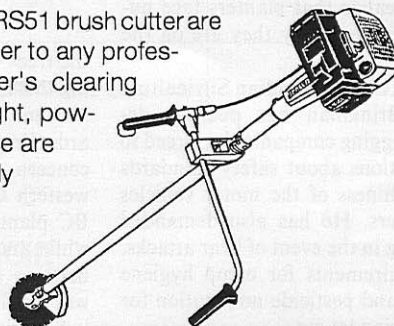
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try contract is not used often and that in any case, Ministry contractors are generally conscientious about following established regulations.

Also there seems to be a considerable gap between standards in Ontario and other provinces. Landy said he expects all of New Forest's camps to be inspected at least once this year by Ministry of Health inspectors and that those inspectors are quite diligent about enforcing existing rules and regulations.

"The point we would make is that we think the industry is very heavily legislated as it is and we feel that any changes need to be in the area of education and information dissemination, not in the area of increased rules and regulations."

Ken LeClaire, coordinator for new business implementation with the Ministry of Natural Resources forest management group in Sault Ste. Marie, said that although most Ontario contracts do not spell

Claire said.

Grant Brodeur concurs that planter education is better than legislation.

"You can educate these guys as much as you want, but at the same time, you're not baby-sitting them. You think your planters are going to have enough common sense...or at least you hope they do."

Brodeur and Landy agreed that in Ontario—at least, the industry-wide safety record is improving enough that Workers' Compensation Board premiums, which serve as a barometer to the number of accidents each year have actually declined over the past two years.

That statistic is no consolation to the families of the 11 planters who were killed (or to those injured on the job this year), and it would be crass to say that these accidents could have happened to anyone, at any time. The fact is, however that it appears many of the safety concerns raised as a result of the two tragedies are in place, but lack the ministerial mechanisms or manpower to ensure adequate enforcement.

If nothing else, perhaps this summer's deaths will force the ministers of forestry in each province to ensure specific regulations are enacted and existing regulations are enforced. ♣

Silviculture

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out specific requirements as to camp hygiene etc, they do state that certain regulations must be followed in accordance with specific acts.

"We have people out in the bush monitoring each contractor. They are not policemen, but if they see a violation of the act they can point it out to the contractor. Once in a while if they see something the contractor refuses to correct, they call the appropriate ministry and report a 'possible violation.'

"In fairness to the industry I have to say that the increase in maturity has been dramatic over the past ten years. We had some pretty big problems for the first few years, but the contractors have acted well, both reactively to avoid the penalties contained in the contracts and proactively to make sure the industry is looked upon in a good light in Ontario."

In general, safety is important but it "is not a grave concern," LeClaire said.

"Contractors know the ramifications of a poorly run program. They will be hit with higher WCB premiums and they run the risk of people not coming to work for them. Word of mouth gets around very quickly among silviculture workers," Le-

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