



DEPARTMENT OF  
**LABOUR**  
TE TARI MAHI

# Forestry Bulletin



## WorkSafe Week 1997



The Minister of Labour, Max Bradford announced that New Zealand's first national week devoted to workplace health and safety will be held on 6-10 October this year. The week will be run by OSH with industry groups.

The week marks the official launch of OSH's strategic direction:

### *Together to Zero: Eliminating Workplace Deaths*

The ultimate aim is to stamp out death in the workplace. Three industries account for the highest workplace fatalities year after year—they are:

- Farming
- Construction
- Forestry.

Let's look at part of our forestry industry—logging:

- If you work in logging, you are 70 times more likely to have a fatal accident than the average New Zealand worker.
- If you work in logging for 40 years, you have a 1 in 7 chance of dying in an accident.
- Felling trees and operating mobile plant cause 9 out of 10 fatal accidents.
- Poor worker skill is the main causal factor in the fatalities.

Let's look at logging deaths over the last five years:

#### **Felling fatalities:**

- Cut-up and hung-up trees. (44%)
- Objects falling into the work area. (17%)
- Trees kicking and sliding off the stump. (17%)
- Felling trees on workmates. (12%)
- Other. (10%)

#### **Mobile plant fatalities:**

- Thrown out and crushed by rollover—not wearing wear seat belts. (47%)
- Being crushed between, or by, plant. (23%)
- Maintenance errors. (18%)
- Plant malfunction. (12%)

In all forestry work (this includes any work in connection with land clearing, silviculture, logging, transportation, portable wood processing, arboriculture and tree work in catchment areas and maintenance of power lines) the figures are similar. Tree felling and operating mobile plant cause 8 out of 10 of all fatal accidents.

### **Together To Zero—Eliminating Workplace Deaths**

Is this direction achievable?

Now before you let off a stream of NOES, let's just look at the situation. The most dangerous operations are felling trees and operating plant.

#### **Felling trees:**

- a) Hung-up and cut-up trees are the villains.
  - People think they can zip under a hang up, whack a cut into the holding tree and hop out. Have you done this? Maybe. Others have and are dead.
  - Who'd work in front of a cut up tree? "Not me," you say! Others have and they're dead, when a puff of wind tips the tree on top of them as they work on felling the next tree or trimming one already felled.

***For hung-up and cut-up trees, use a machine where possible. Remember to keep out of any danger until the tree is on the ground.***

- b) Trees sliding or kicking off the stump or material falling into the work area.
- Had a tree kick back at you or slide on the stump? Of course you have. This happens quickly.

***Watch the tree to the ground and until it settles.***

- Branches falling out of trees or adjacent trees can happen after the felled tree has settled.

***Watch from your escape route.***

- c) Felling trees on top of your work mate— Surely you wouldn't do this!

***Remember the simple two-tree length felling rule.***

### **Operating mobile plant**

- a) Machine rolled, thrown out and crushed.
- You wear your car seat belt when you take mum and the kids down town to McDonald's. Why not at work? Remember in a previous bulletin it was concluded that 17 out of 21 fatalities could have been avoided if the operator had worn a seat belt or operator restraint device. Nothing was worn in any of the fatalities. Surely a good place to start "Together to Zero".

***Wear a seat belt or operator restraint device at all times mobile plant is in motion.***

- b) Crushed between plant/objects
- Machines have got hard corners and are unforgiving. Lack of attention to plant movement, poor layout of work area or lack of room are contributors. Skid workers are likely to say "I'll just finish this" and a machine can be on them.
- c) Maintenance errors
- Who would work under suspended hydraulics or without shutting down a machine?
- d) Plant malfunction
- Purely a lack of carrying out regular, essential maintenance on brakes and steering. Sounds mighty simple!

Looking back at these individual causes of death, you can sense that you've heard them all before. Most of them are rules that have been around for years and they are included in the industry codes for safety and health. They are all common sense ways of preventing fatalities.

Maybe "Together to Zero"—eliminating workplace deaths is within our reach. It is certainly worth striving towards. You all know the grief and sorrow when someone is killed at work - "If only he hadn't done .....".

### **The main causal factor of fatalities is poor skill of the worker.**

In addition to looking at the individual causes above, we need to have a close look at improvement of work skills, as poor skill has been identified as the main overall causal factor in fatalities. Greg Steele of the Forest Industries Training and Educational Council (FITEC) will look at this issue in a future *Forestry Bulletin*.

Things that need to be looked at outside the training and upskilling are those such as:

- Unacceptable safety culture—macho image and "It can't happen to me" mentality.
- Unacceptable workplace behaviours—temper, violence, drugs, alcohol.
- Unacceptable work practices—short-cuts, ignoring safety rules, not using safety equipment provided.
- Failure to recognise health problems—diet, fatigue, stress.
- Organisational problems—crew turnover, absenteeism, production/quality pressures, changing targets.

Think about this list—are you guilty of any? They all help in some way to lower workplace stability, safety and satisfaction.

Two new codes are currently being developed in forestry work. These are:

1. *Approved Code of Practice for Health and Safety in Forest Operations*. This code combines four of the former Bush Codes and contains the rules and regulations. It will be supported by guidelines which are to contain best work practices, safety and training and are targeted at the people doing the work—the contractors and employees. The guidelines have yet to be developed.
2. *Approved Code of Practice for Health and Safety in Tree Work: Part 3: River and Streams Operations*. This code covers the range of tree work carried out in catchment operations.

A copy of either code is available for comment from your local OSH inspector (forestry).