



Jim Harris Show (CHNL – AM)

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Interviewer: Jim Harrison

Interviewee: Reynold Hert, CEO, BC Forest Safety Council

Announcer: Your city your province, your viewpoint. This is the Jim Harrison show.

Jim Harris: Welcome back to the program we're coming up to National Forestry Week September 20 through the 26. And while it's been a rough go for the forestry industry economically, there is apparently one bright spot we can talk about and that is forest safety. So we're pleased to welcome a former mill manager for Weyerhaeuser in Kamloops, and now CEO of the BC Forest Safety Council, Reynold Hert, welcome back.

Reynold Hert: Well thank you Jim.

JM: I understand you are a new Grandfather.

RH: Yes, I am. It's two weeks ago, proud grandparent.

JM: Now you believe forest safety is something worth celebrating this week. What have you accomplished?

RH: Jim you know we had a very poor track record of safety in the forest industry. And that's improved dramatically, and I think the true test is when you hit tough economic times like this that people can stay with it, and companies are. The fatality rates and the injury rates are beginning to drop even in these difficult times, and more companies are signing up to become safe certified. So I think that's a very positive sign.

JM: I guess your job, with the role of the Safety Council has been over the last five years to set new standards and safety audits for more than 2,000 companies. How did you convince them all to buy in?

RH: Well I think the leadership really came from the top and in this case from the industry itself, the governments and the unions. People who were looking at poor track records. What really become worse in the early part of this decade, you know we had the highest number of fatalities in 2005 in the mid-forties. And leadership of the industry, government, and the unions said enough is enough. We need to make a change here they put together a task force, the task force made recommendations. Since that time everyone has been following through, and SAFE Certification was a part of that. SAFE Certification basically means that every company has a level of safety that they get certified to, that every company that's certified to that has very good systems in place to prevent injuries and improve their business management.

JH: Was it a case that a lot of the workers, you know while they work hard did their job, just weren't thinking safety, or didn't have the level of qualification necessary, was that the short fall?

RH: It's a combination of two things I would say. One is what you talked about, that workers themselves did not have the skills. So what people have done in going through certification is really a good program of, what skills do I have to have, how do I really know that people have them and if we're short in training,

what training do we put in place. So that's part of the skill build up. The other part that's been key is what I call planning and awareness. People now go through a much more rigorous process of planning their operations, just thinking and looking for where hazards could be, and on a daily basis workers are also encouraged to take time to stop, look and see, what is unexpected, what hazards are out there and how do we deal with them on a planning basis daily. So if you think about it good planning, good review for hazards at all levels from regional plans, to the design, to the construction of facilities, to the equipment you're buying, to the daily operation.

JH: And I guess that's why the training has you know embraced everyone, right from top to the bottom. Not just the fallers or the safety officers, but supervisors as well.

RH: Exactly. And what you see is that we started obviously in the high risk areas, the industry did. The training took place specifically for fallers, then some improvements there, and now it's moving on to other parts of the industry, and it's just going to keep going. We'll keep looking and seeing where injuries are occurring, what's causing them and working through the major areas down to the minor.

JH: How extensive is this certification for fallers? I'm given to understand that that educational program to get certification could be as costly as \$10,000. Is that the case? And if so who pays?

RH: The fallers themselves pay. That's correct it could be as much as \$10,000. Today if you wanted to become a faller, you actually have to go through a thirty day training program, and that's the major cost. It's very close supervisor and training during that time period. People go through all the basics and actually end up falling trees under very close guidance. And that's the key part of the cost there. And we've seen you know quite a difference now that fallers are going out, it's like coaching a basketball team, first thing you do is you make sure everybody's got the fundamentals right then you can move on from there, and that's what's making in this scenario. Every faller out there now we're making sure they've got the fundamentals right.

JH: Now, obviously there's so many to the forest sector, it's not just faller that can be in harms way, what other elements of the industry have unacceptably high injury or fatality levels?

RH: No surprise, transportation of goods, in other words people using the roads, and everything from single pickups, even including people using the roads for vacations, right up to the logging trucks, that's been the next big area. Some significant efforts taking place in those areas as well. A lot of work going on now on the resource roads and putting together user groups that really plan how the operations work within the watershed, rather than just letting it happen on a random basis. And also a lot of work going on in truck driver training, and again same question, how do you really know if people are qualified for the job, what skills do they have and what training is available to them out there.

JH: Used to be I guess the culture that injuries and accidents were just part of that job, part of that industry. Has it been a major, major challenge to get that culture changed?

RH: It has been but I would also have to say that the good news is that the shift is occurring pretty hard. People start to see some positive results pretty quickly realize that it doesn't have to be the way it was. Uh I'd say that we're not finished that transition yet. There's still some people out there who believe that the industry does have to have some injuries but that group is getting smaller, and more folks are being convinced that you can run without injury.

JH: Now there will be some skeptics out there who will suggest that you've had a reduction in fatalities and a reduction in on the job injuries, not so much because the industry is really taking a proactive

approach to getting rid of these things, but because the economy has turned down and fewer people are working.

RH: Jim that is a good question. And there is no question that the overall number of injuries is down because fewer people are working. When we did do our stats we actually adjust for that. So far example, we measure injuries themselves by the number of injuries per 100 thousand cubic metres of wood that's been harvested. And so that stat, if you think of it, it doesn't matter if you're harvesting normal provincial levels, or half of that, it's still how many injuries per 100 thousand cubic metres of wood.

JH: Only a short time left but what's on the horizon. What's your next target?

RH: The next place where we're looking is we're starting to say the woods, in the woods was the first target place, that was timber harvesting. When the industry started this they were looking at spreading some of this work throughout the industry wide. So you've got to start to ask the question now, what really happens on the mill side, in a co-ordinated fashion. Every company out there has already been doing some work but is there potential for a coordinated approach on that side.

JH: Big strides made in improving forest safety. Something to take note of just ahead of National Forest Safety Week, Forestry Week, thanks once again to Forest Safety Council CEO Reynold Hert for spending some time with us.

RH: Thanks Jim.

JH: Bye.

RH: Bye.