

BC Forest Safety Ombudsman

fact sheet

Ombudsman Fact Sheet

What is an Ombudsman?

- An independent and impartial advisory voice to deal with safety concerns within the forest sector
- Provides confidentiality and protection for individuals and companies raising safety concerns
- Deals with safety issues that may arise between employees, sub-contractors, contractors, licensees and government agencies
- Provides a forum for discussion and review within the sector on any matter related to safety
- Facilitates fair, equitable and timely solutions to concerns that arise
- Fosters communication about safety and safety programs and the functions of the Office of the Forest Safety Ombudsman
- Identifies new problems and provides support for responsible systems changes

What won't the Forest Safety Ombudsman do?

- Become involved in existing processes in place to resolve issues or in any matters under investigation, court processes, grievance or other formal proceedings
- Make binding decisions, mandate policies or adjudicate issues for involved parties
- Compel any organization or individual to deal with the Office of the Ombudsman

The BC Forest Safety Ombudsman is:

- Someone who will enhance safety in the BC forest sector by becoming a safe, confidential and persuasive agent for raising and reviewing safety concerns throughout the sector and facilitating impartial and timely resolution of safety issues
- A BC Forest Safety Council (BCFSC) appointee funded by the forest industry through the BCFSC
- An independent and impartial advisory voice that carries out all the responsibilities of the ombudsman while also providing feedback to the BCFSC on trends, issues, policies and practices



Who is the BC Forest Safety Ombudsman?

- Roger Harris was appointed as ombudsman in early 2006
- Harris has been actively involved in the forest industry since he was 19
 - From 1972-1979 he worked in most of the operational positions in the industry
 - Served as a board member for Local 1-71 of the IWA, representing the Queen Charlotte Islands and coast region as far south as Bella Coola
 - In 1980 began working for MacMillan Bloedel's as an employee relations supervisor for the North Island and then contract supervisor at Alfred Bay and Louise Islands
 - Established his own phase logging contract business operation in 1985
 - In 2001, Harris entered provincial politics as the Liberal MLA for Skeena
 - In 2004, Harris was appointed Minister of State for Forestry Operations
- Harris intimately understands the importance of safety in the forest industry and the impact injuries can have on families and workers
 - In 1986 while working as a falling contractor, his right hand was nearly severed when his chain saw kicked back
 - His brother-in-law was killed in a forestry accident at age 18

What has the BC Forest Safety Ombudsman done?

Not Out of the Woods

- Harris' first report as ombudsman focused on reviewing training and certification in the forest industry
- Found a critical labour shortage looming in the forest industry coupled with a significant drop in company-led training, could severely compromise safety
- Made 15 recommendations to industry, the BC Forest Safety Council, WorkSafeBC and various levels of government addressing concerns about re-training for injured workers, changes to two of the training programs offered by the forest sector and stress in the workplace

BC Forest Safety Ombudsman Annual Report – 2006-07

- Describes work completed during Harris' first year as ombudsman, including a summary of the inquiries handled and a description of his first formal review process
- Provides insight into plans for second year as ombudsman
- Reveals target area for next review: resource roads



No Longer the Road Less Travelled

- Harris' second report as ombudsman focused on safety on BC's resource roads
- Found that addressing safety issues on resource roads is a shared responsibility and is going to require cross-government and cross-industry support and participation
- Made 17 recommendations to government, industry, the BC Forest Safety Council and WorkSafeBC including forming Regional Safety Management Groups responsible for certain road networks, implementing an Industrial Drivers Certification Program and redesignating resource roads that serve as primary or secondary access routes to communities as public highways

All reports can be found on Council's web site: www.bcforestsafe.org

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