

## FIELD SAWMILLS LTD. PARTNERSHIP

Courtenay, BC

### Sawmill Produces Safety as Well as Lumber

Fields Sawmills Limited Partnership in Courtenay, B. C. knew two things. One was that too many of its workers were hurting their back, shoulders and wrists and the other was that the program in place was not effective enough to prevent these repetitive strain injuries that are typical of many mills.

“We had a safety program established before we started working with the WCB,” says Plant Manager Terry Hamilton, “but the climate of the safety meetings was more like management on one side of the room and the employees on the other.”

Hamilton continued, “Our workers and management and the WCB safety officer put a lot of effort into the new Joint Safety Committee at the center of our planning to reduce injuries. The Co-Chairs from labour and management work together to coordinate and implement new safety procedures. Just as important, they work to raise the awareness of everyday safety around the mill.”

In 1998 when Fields had 42 lost-time accidents, they became a focus firm. After WCB began working cooperatively with the mill management, Hamilton and workers on the joint committee sat down individually with the mill’s workers to hear their ideas on how to work more safely and prevent injuries. That one-on-one communication helped change the attitude of the nearly 200 men working at the mill.

“They’ve worked quite hard at implementing a strong health and safety program and have seen a lot of success,” says Bjarne Nielsen, WCB Occupational Safety Officer in the Courtenay/Campbell River/Terrace region. “When I first came in there, they didn’t fully understand what a safety program was or how to implement it. Since I’ve worked with them, they’ve really taken it on and they’ve put in an excellent safety program, a real cooperative effort. We’re all quite proud of the fact that the numbers are coming down the way they are.”

In 2000 the mill only had 19 lost-time accidents, a 55 per cent drop over the previous year. And their safety record has continued to improve.

“We put safe production at the forefront on a daily basis,” says Hamilton. “You can’t have one without the other. That kind of improvement at our mill came from the commitment of every person working here.”

In 1998 Fields had been operating a green chain with about fifteen workers per shift hand-sorting lumber by length and grade. Back and shoulder injuries were common as a result of workers repeatedly pulling boards as long as 20 feet and 4” by 4” off the chain transfer and piling them onto lumber carts.

“Our Safety Committee reviewed the work habits of those workers who piled lumber but had no strain injuries. Other workers were retrained to use the better techniques. This simple change resulted in a significant reduction in strain injuries even before we installed the J-bar system,” says Hamilton.

Jon Foster, one of the Co-Chairs, is pleased that the mechanical J-Bar sorter has been so effective. He said, “Guys were pulling lumber in awkward positions and the sheer volume coming out of the mill left a lot of workers with sore shoulders, knees and backs. After we improved the safety program the men began switching around on the green chain until the J-Bar was installed. We no longer have to sort lumber manually which is a big improvement.”

Foster notes that working cooperatively with management and the WCB has made a real difference in the way the workers approach their jobs. “Management has really come on board with safety and is showing their commitment to the workers,” he says. “The men see that commitment and they work safer.”

“We’d rather prevent accidents before they happen, not deal with them after,” adds Hamilton. “We were concerned with the number of strain injuries we had and we did something about it. With the Joint Committee continuing to work effectively I’m sure we will have more improvement as we promote Safe Production.”

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