



## ***Changing times make young worker safety crucial***

If more than 95 per cent of an operation's labour force is older than 24 years, is there a point to keeping on top of young worker safety?

A crucial one, especially if you anticipate an exodus of older employees to erupt in the next five years or so, says Paolo Danesin, team leader for occupational health and safety at Northwood Pulp Mill.

Already seeing a small outflow from the Canfor mill that needs 500 workers to keep functioning 24/7/365, Danesin intends to be ready as more departures occur.

The foundation for his preparations is a program that focuses on risk assessment and trains workers to recognize hazards and eliminate or control them before starting work. Communication with supervisors is a key factor.

The Northwood program is called *Safety by Choice, Not by Chance*. It parallels *Think and Do*, used by Canfor's two other Prince George area pulp mills. Both programs shape the young worker training now used almost entirely for students hired for summer jobs at the three mills. Danesin expects this training to be adaptable for larger groups as more and more baby boomers leave.

Currently, the three Canfor mills conduct a combined two-day orientation that, besides offering specific company safety information, relies on content from WorkSafeBC. Participants watch and discuss *Lost Youth*, a video produced by the safety agency that features young workers describing their own serious injuries and the aftermaths. As well, a local safety officer covers workers' safety rights and responsibilities.

A third day of initial orientation finds the students at the individual mills where they'll work. Northwood hired 27 students this year, and Danesin describes the first exposure to the workplace as an eye-opener for newcomers.



“This is a very dangerous industry, and workers need to concentrate 100 per cent on their surroundings, a point that *Lost Youth* drives home,” he says.

After a general orientation to the mill, the young workers go to the plant floor and meet their co-workers and area supervisors. This is the real introduction to the hazards of each specific work area, according to Danesin.

Two hazards common in pulp mills like Northwood are: several highly-corrosive, caustic chemicals that can burn workers; and hydrogen sulfide gas, a by-product of the pulp-making process that in some circumstances can be fatal.

Information like that is the background for key safety messages driven home continually by the experienced workers assigned to individual young workers as mentors:

- ▶ It's impossible to ask a stupid question, so check with your supervisor or co-workers about anything you don't understand or believe isn't appropriate. Never say, “I think I'm doing this right.” Make sure.
  
- ▶ Don't try so hard to please that you put yourself at risk. If you want to make an impression, make sure you always know what you're doing and constantly work safely. That will impress.