



WorkSafeBC officers Gordon Craigie and Laura Smylie go over the site plan with employees at Sladey Timber Ltd.

Preventing phase congestion

By Gord Woodward

As multi-phase harvesting operations have become the norm in B.C., forestry workers find themselves at busy worksites that can present an increased level of risk. These five tips provide a starting point for how to manage the risks when harvesting and other activities overlap.

Phase congestion is an industry-wide problem and has resulted in serious injuries and fatalities. But, activities in a well-planned cutblock can function safely even if a variety of different work processes are happening at the same time — it's called safe phase integration.

When one phase of harvesting can adversely affect another, it's called "phase congestion." This can put worker safety at risk for a wide range of jobs. Phase congestion affects road builders, harvesting operations, log haulers, timber cruisers, survey crews, and on-site researchers. Even silviculture workers'

safety can be at increased risk due to post-harvest conditions and road deactivation.

"The reality is, it can occur on any logging operation throughout the province," says Budd Phillips, a WorkSafeBC manager of Prevention Field Services based in Fort St. John.

Phase congestion has many scenarios. It occurs when different parts of a forestry operation — such as people and machines — get too close to each other. It also can occur if people work above or below an operation and their work could impact others on site. Think of falling a tree at the top of a slope while logging trucks travel on a road below.

Health and safety on site is the responsibility of everyone who has an influence over how the work is conducted. Licensees/owners need to plan for the work activities and workplace conditions to prevent all known or foreseeable risk to workers. This includes planning the timing and sequence of operations to

ensure there is adequate separation between phases and workers.

Five tips workers need to know about phase integration

Once the plan is made, all workers need to get on board. For workers, the following five tips will help you understand your role in safe phase integration. For employers, share these tips at your next team talk:

1 Know the plan

The daily crew talk is the perfect time for you to review your role in the overall cutblock plan. “What are the things that can cause additional risks for you, either by what you’re doing or what others might be doing?” asks Phillips. Ensure there are suitable controls in place, such as barriers, processes, and procedures, to prevent incidents from occurring.

Check with your supervisor to make sure you’re not working below hand fallers or equipment that could lose control of logs or trees. Find out how close you will be to other workers and equipment. And make sure you know what to do if you have to walk through the work area: How will you ensure that everyone can see you? What is the process to make sure that equipment will stop until you are safely through the work area?

2 Be prepared for change

“A plan may not always go as planned,” cautions Darcy Moshenko, a WorkSafeBC industry specialist for forestry. Conditions can change, for reasons as varied as weather, mechanical breakdowns, personnel changes, adding phases or people to the worksite, slope and terrain variability, transitioning timber types, or decreasing the size of work area as the block nears completion.

“If changing conditions endanger you, stop work immediately,” Moshenko advises. “If you’re not in immediate danger, check with your supervisor and revisit the plan.”

3 Keep your safe distances

“Be aware of your surroundings,” Moshenko says. “Look up, look around, and listen.” Be alert for anything that could have an impact on you, such as equipment moving inadvertently or someone walking through your area. If that happens while you’re operating equipment, stop your work

process, lower the working heads, shut the machine off, and allow the person to walk in the clear before you start up again. Talk to your supervisor to ensure controls are in place to avoid unintended interaction between humans and equipment.

Respect the safe zones displayed on harvesting machines. Ask your supervisor if proximity detectors are being used. Just remember that some hazards aren’t confined to safe zones. “For example, a runaway log on a slope can run for hundreds of metres.”

4 Maintain communication

“Good communication is essential to ensure safe phase integration,” Moshenko says. “Be in constant contact and have various means of communication.” A mix of radio, eye contact, whistles, hand signals, and horns enhances your safety. “Ensure everyone on site knows and is using the same communication signals,” adds Phillips. “At the start of your shift, check to ensure all communication devices are in good working order. A radio with technical issues increases risk and leaves you one step closer to an incident.”

5 Adopt a safety mindset

You have an obligation under the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation to refuse unsafe work. And you share in the responsibility for keeping yourself safe in the workplace. If you feel your safety is being compromised, stop what you are doing, communicate with your co-workers, contact your supervisor, reassess the plan, and continue work only when it is safe to do so.

“Historically, the forest industry has had a ‘get it done’ attitude that has sometimes led to an acceptance of high-risk situations. It’s not acceptable,” says Moshenko. “If safety is not on your mind, just remember that safety is on the mind of those waiting for you and your team to return home at the end of the day.” ☺

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—Darcy Moshenko, industry specialist,
WorkSafeBC