

On the cover

Hand faller James Lane and supervisor Jeremiah Meredith survey a cut tree at a logging site west of Barrière, B.C.



Supervisors play pivotal role in safe hand falling

By Jesse Marchand

WorkSafeBC's risk-based inspections have found that while hand fallers have some of the highest injury rates in the province, most incidents are preventable with proper supervision.

Manual tree falling is a specialized skill that's not for the faint of heart. It requires good judgement, attention to detail, split decision making, and expertise in regulations, risk assessment and control — on top of the physical strength and stamina needed to deal with heavy trees and equipment in all sorts of weather.

WorkSafeBC statistics show that hand falling is one of the most dangerous jobs in B.C.: the injury rate in the manual tree falling classification unit was 20.1 in 2020 — nearly ten times the provincial average of 2.15. Meanwhile, the serious injury rate was 6.5, compared to the provincial average of 0.27.

“Each of these serious injuries represents life-changing consequences for both the workers and their loved ones,” says Al Johnson, head of Prevention Services at WorkSafeBC. “Even one such injury is too many when the incidents that cause them are often preventable.” Sadly, incidents in this industry also resulted in the deaths of two hand fallers in 2021.

Building up your safety leaders

In the summer of 2021, WorkSafeBC began reaching out to members of industry to build an understanding of the circumstances that can lead to workplace incidents and what can be done to address them before another tragic outcome occurs.

“Through our increased focus on risk-based inspections, WorkSafeBC has identified inadequate supervision as a primary factor in workplace incidents at hand falling operations,” says Dave McBride, senior manager in OHS Consultation and Education Services at WorkSafeBC.

Supervisors have an important role on the job site and their duties are clearly defined in the *Workers Compensation Act*, notes Budd Phillips, WorkSafeBC manager of interest for forestry. Section 23 of the Act, — fully excerpted in this article — underscores how supervisors are responsible for ensuring everyone under their supervision remains healthy and safe at the worksite.

“Supervisors are the people who will make or break your health and safety system” says Phillips. “They are

your safety leaders. They are the people you rely on to make sure your safety system is functioning and they are the people you need to give your support to.”

Support starts by ensuring supervisors have the training and qualifications they need. “They have to know the hazards, and the means to control those hazards,” notes Phillips. When hiring a supervisor, you need to look for the right education, training, and experience for the particular job at hand. They also need to be designated as supervisor, stresses Phillips. “They have to know that they have this role and other people on site need to know they have this role.”

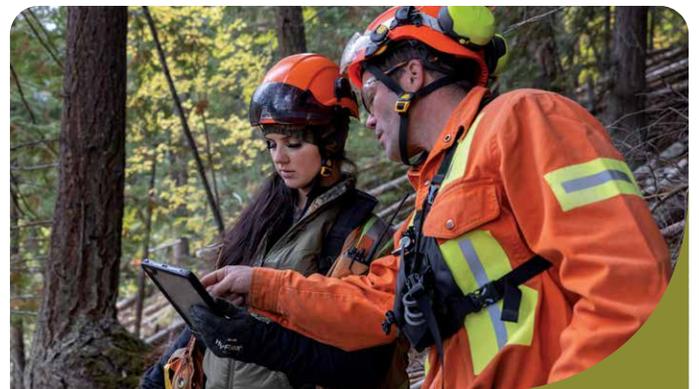
Part of ensuring supervisors are properly designated is involving them in safety planning right from the start. Not only do they need to know what the work plan is, they need to have input in the plan. Any everyone on the project — hand fallers, supervisors, employers and the prime contractor — needs to be notified of any changes to a work plan, notes Phillips. “Many incidents occur because of a change that was not communicated.”

Being a more effective supervisor

If you are a supervisor, you can start improving health and safety at your worksite by asking questions and taking the time to observe work in progress.

“How do you assess the risk that your fallers are facing on a day to day basis?” asks Phillips. “Don't just rely on the fallers to tell you something is wrong. That's passive. Supervisors need to take an active role. Think about it as an active engagement.”

You should also record what you find and refer to it often. Conditions on a worksite can change day to day



Forestry supervisor Melissa Harbourne and area supervisor Toby Jeffreys go over the safety plan at the worksite.



Boarding a helicopter at the end of the day near Adams Lake, B.C.

and even hour to hour. You must have records of what decisions were made and why.

David Adshead is a falling safety advisor for the BC Forest Safety Council (BCFSC). Through his role, he provides field work outreach to various employers across the province. When it comes to risk, he says there are three main factors for hand fallers:

- 1 **The natural environment:** This includes the timber, terrain, type of project, the weather, etc.
- 2 **Other phases:** This means taking into account what other activities are occurring on the worksite besides hand falling, such as road building or yarding and loading.
- 3 **People:** This includes the personalities of your crew, their experience levels, and personal lives.

A good supervisor takes all this into account when overseeing work and assigning roles. “You need to identify where your attention needs to be focused and make records of your decisions,” says Adshead.

What keeps you up at night?

For Terry Anonson, supervisor for WorkSafeBC’s provincial hand falling inspection team, hand falling is like “practising physics on the fly.” The one question he asks all supervisors on worksites is “What’s keeping you up at night?” It could be concerns such as steep

terrain, unfavourable weather, the health of the forest, congested work phases, crew transport, isolation, overcrowding, or new fallers. Emotional health has an impact too, including substance abuse, depression or even a bad night’s sleep.

“We know there is inherent risk to hand falling, but you need to know ‘what’s elevating that risk?’” notes Terry. “There are circumstances that can elevate risk to fallers and the team needs more supervision based on the current risk factors.”

Scott Rushton, a falling safety advisor for the BCFSC, also highlights preventative actions as key to increasing safety for B.C.’s hand fallers. With 36 years working on the coast as a logger and certified falling supervisor, Rushton has seen many supervisors be reactive to incidents, only making changes after work has stopped because of an incident. While it’s necessary to have incident reviews, he’d like to see a more proactive approach adopted overall.

Rushton says hand fallers should always be able to answer “What hazards are in the immediate area right where you are standing and what controls are in place?” He adds “fallers need to be able to identify what the hazards are and describe their tree-falling plan. They should always know their check-in procedures, as well as the plan for failure to respond.”

He also notes that supervisors need to observe the

work in action. “A simple correction, such as adjusting how your hands are wrapped around the chainsaw, could be the difference between getting an injury and going home safe at the end of the day.”

Creating a team atmosphere

For clearing supervisor Mike Davidson, the owner of Black Summit Falling, it comes down to respecting the people in the field and ensuring that everyone’s voice is heard. “Supervisors have the ability to improve employee performance by enhancing competency,” says Davidson. “Give them praise when they are doing a good job and give awards to your team for safe work practices.”

He also emphasizes the involvement of your hand fallers in your meetings, safety talks, and hazard reporting. “Individual hand fallers’ experiences need to be valued,” says Davidson. He stresses that hand fallers must be encouraged to participate in safety meetings and hazard reporting. “Make it positive to come forward with a hazard,” he adds. “Respect and acknowledgement is the most important thing.”

Help for hand fallers

In November of 2021, WorkSafeBC held an information session for hand fallers that had more than 100 attendees. Throughout 2022, WorkSafeBC will continue engaging with this industry through their dedicated hand falling inspection team under the Forestry High Risk Strategy. The goals of the strategy are to reduce the serious injury and fatal injury rates in forestry operations with the greatest risk exposure and raise awareness and promote adherence to safe practices. In 2022, prevention officers will take a risk-based approach to inspections ensure that the most significant risks are effectively managed.

The BCFSC is also currently working on updating the falling supervisor course with the help of falling supervisors, contractors, and the Falling Technical Advisory Committee. “Once ready, the course will be piloted and fine-tuned after receiving feedback from the instructors and participants,” says Rushton. “I’m really quite excited to see the final results. I believe it will strengthen the effectiveness of practical faller supervision.”

Supporting industry is a key part of the BCFSC’s and WorkSafeBC’s strategies. “Achieving positive change takes collaboration,” noted Johnson at the hand falling session. “We all have a part to play in realizing our vision of a British Columbia free from workplace injury,

disease, and death.” He emphasized that making sure fallers go home safe at the end of the day will take a commitment from all sides: “We need to learn from each other and find ways to make things healthier and safer.”

Our website has resources to help. Search for the following on worksafebc.com:

- WorkSafeBC’s inspectional approach for forestry can be found on the [High Risk Strategy: Forestry](#) page.
- Health and safety resources can be found on the [Manual falling & bucking](#) page. ☺

Know your responsibilities

Section 23 of the *Workers Compensation Act* covers supervision.

23 General duties of supervisors

- (1) Every supervisor must
 - a) ensure the health and safety of all workers under the direct supervision of the supervisor,
 - b) be knowledgeable about the OHS provisions and those regulations applicable to the work being supervised, and
 - c) comply with the OHS provisions, the regulations and any applicable orders.
- (2) Without limiting subsection (1), a supervisor must
 - (a) ensure that the workers under the supervisor’s direct supervision
 - i. are made aware of all known or reasonably foreseeable health or safety hazards in the area where they work, and
 - ii. (ii) comply with the OHS provisions, the regulations and any applicable orders,
 - (b) consult and cooperate with the joint committee or worker health and safety representative for the workplace, and
 - (c) cooperate with the Board, officers of the Board and any other person carrying out a duty under the OHS provisions or the regulations.