

After the logs are dropped down from the crane, the driver will need to secure them before driving away. Throwing ties and wrappers could be a source of injury — one the industry is trying to prevent.

Putting the brakes on log-hauler injuries

By Gord Woodward

Log haulers have a stubbornly high injury rate. From musculoskeletal injuries from throwing wrappers to secure the logs, to slips, trips, and falls, to motor vehicle incidents, a lot can go wrong when you're hauling logs.

Safety practices for log haulers have improved significantly over the years. But the injury rate remains high — between 2014 and 2017 the average injury rate for log haulers was 5.85. That means that, on average, for every 100 people working for a full year, 5.85 are injured. By comparison, the injury rate for all industries in B.C. in the same period is 2.25.

“More volume is being hauled and we have more miles and greater distances to go than ever before,” says Trish Kohorst, transportation safety manager for the BC Forest Safety Council. “But the industry is very engaged and committed to reducing injuries, and positive progress is being made,” she adds.

Due to the high injury rate, log transportation is one of the focus areas of the WorkSafeBC High Risk Strategy on forestry. The team of officers specializing in forestry

has been working with the safety council to reach out to drivers and employers across B.C.

“Driving a log truck can be a stressful and demanding job. As a driver, you need to be alert and focused on what is happening on the road, the load, the truck, and yourself,” says Budd Phillips, manager, Prevention Field Services at WorkSafeBC.

Some of the key factors contributing to log-hauler injuries are unsafe driving, lack of road assessment, and improper loading, offloading, and securing of loads. Improper use of seat belts and three-point contact procedures, or not using them at all, are other common factors.

While regulations address each of these areas, they're just part of the solution, says Greg Munden, president of Kamloops-based Munden Ventures, which has hauled logs since 1967. Another important piece is creating a safety culture mindset — and that's the direction he's seeing the industry move toward. “There are lots of companies doing really good things,” he says.

Munden's business, for example, implemented electronic log books about four years ago. It also uses

telematics in its 14 trucks to track driving information such as revolutions per minute (RPM), speed, and harsh braking. Using the information, “we have developed a driver scorecard to work individually with our drivers on opportunities for improvement,” he explains. Each driver’s score is tied to a safety bonus.

“It really demonstrates to them that we are genuinely interested in safety. They know we mean what we say,” Munden says.

Keep up the training

Jeremy Kuharchuk, owner of Blue Valley Trucking in Vanderhoof, says training is the focus for his company. “I’m very firm about making sure getting home at night is a priority for my guys,” he says. “I’m out there a lot of days with them. We don’t let anything slide.”

Last summer the company was one of the first to volunteer for a B.C. Forest Safety Council competency assessment course for all of its drivers and substitutes. The firm later developed its own training tool.

The safety council’s Kohorst advocates early, and ongoing, education. “We need to make sure that we are training drivers appropriately from the moment they enter the industry,” she says.

Blue Valley’s safety programs cover everything from seat belts to speed. Driver Steve Martens appreciates the emphasis on his well-being. “They tell us to get home safe at the end of the day, and they really stick to it,” says the veteran of 28 years of log hauling.

Kuharchuk encourages employers to view safety as an investment. “It doesn’t cost that much if it means 10 truckers going out with the right attitude and knowing someone is fighting for them,” he explains. “In the long run, you’ll get it back.”

The road, the load, the truck, the driver

“The mantra of ‘the road, the load, the truck, and the driver,’ are the key elements in keeping you and the truck safe and the wheels headed in the right direction each and every trip, each and every day,” says Budd Phillips, manager, Prevention Field Services at WorkSafeBC:

- **The road:** Keep an eye on changing conditions, including weather, visibility, and especially other road users.
- **The load:** What is happening with your load? Is it stable and secure on the truck?
- **The truck:** When it comes to your truck, is everything working as it should? Is all maintenance and repairs up to date?
- **The driver:** Is your head in the game? Are you alert to everything that is going on around you? Or is it fuzzy and blurred? If so, take a break: Stop, refresh, and carry on when ready. And always wear your seat belt, it could save your life.

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Munden Ventures can even cite a specific return on its investment in safety: It enjoys one of the highest claims discounts available from ICBC.

Resources to help you prevent injuries

What can employers and drivers do to help reduce injuries for log haulers?

Following the National Safety Code's load securement requirements is an important step, says the BC Forest Safety Council. Employers also need to look for opportunities to use engineering solutions such as log loaders.

The council also offers free resources on preventing musculoskeletal injuries (MSIs) — things like strains and sprains that commonly afflict drivers. Developed in conjunction with Mike McAlonan, owner of Total Physio in Houston, B.C., the resources include videos and pamphlets.

"It's not generic information about how to look after your back, for example. It's very specific to logging," McAlonan explains.

He reviewed statistics on the most common injuries and spent time with drivers to analyze their job. His findings: Shoulders, lower backs, necks, and knees are most often injured, caused mainly by chaining up, throwing wrappers, and being sedentary.

The information helped him create easy-to-follow steps drivers can use to prevent MSIs. "We look at simple things, like a change in head posture," McAlonan says. "There are things they can even do at home."

Education of drivers and early intervention are key, he adds. "Talk to them about what the injuries are and why they are happening." MSIs can be treated successfully, but if ignored can lead to injuries that force time off from work.

The resources are available on bcforestsafesafe.org. 



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