

Safety information for fallers: No stand of timber is worth your life

Say no to unsafe work

Hand falling is one of the most dangerous professions in B.C. Every day you make hundreds of critical decisions to do your work safely and productively.

But there's one highly effective safety tool you may have overlooked: the right to refuse unsafe work.

Under the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, not only do you have the right to refuse unsafe work — it's your duty. You owe it to yourself, your crew, and your employer, and more importantly, to your friends and family, who want you to come home safe at the end of the day.

What's an "undue hazard"?

As a professional faller, you face multiple hazards every day. From the moment your truck enters the logging road, you face hazards unheard of by the average person. The risk increases when you enter the falling area, pick up your saw, and place that first cut of the day. Every day you recognize, evaluate, and control those hazards.

But there are some hazards you shouldn't have to deal with. These are the undue hazards — ones where there is a potential for serious injury or death.

According to the Regulation, "a person must not carry out work, or cause others to carry out work, if that person has reasonable cause to believe that to do so would create an undue hazard to the health and safety of any person."

When you're not absolutely sure you can control the hazard in front of you, and the risk is unacceptable — that's an undue hazard. It could be a difficult danger tree that you're not sure how to deal with, the placement of fallers on a right-of-way, or maybe the fog just rolled in and the helicopter won't fly.

To determine whether the job is too risky, ask yourself these questions:

- Am I qualified to do the job, based on my knowledge, skills, and experience?
- Am I qualified to do the job in this timber type and terrain?
- Is there a reasonable harvesting and falling plan to accomplish the work?
- Are other workers or phases of logging too close?
- Is the falling difficulty that I'm trying to overcome too dangerous to attempt?
- Do I feel uncomfortable with what I've been asked to do?
- Is there a safer way to do the work? Can explosives be used to blast that danger tree, or can you get assistance from a piece of fully-guarded equipment?
- Have I discussed possible solutions to overcome the falling difficulty with my falling supervisor or another qualified faller (qualified assistance)?

Report the hazard

If you decide the hazard is unacceptable, report it to your supervisor or employer right away. It's your right — and your responsibility.

Identifying, reporting, and correcting hazards is part of the job, and should be common practice in logging. Once you've reported the hazard or condition, your supervisor or employer must deal with the issue immediately.

It may take time to resolve the issue, and that will affect production. But a whole crew carrying a stretcher across the block will also affect production that day and beyond. No stand of timber is worth risking your life — or the lives of others.

If a known hazard isn't fixed, or you are pressured into continuing with the job, then you have the right to refuse the unsafe work. Remember, you can't be punished or fired from your job for putting safety first. You're doing this to protect yourself, your crew, and even your employer.

The bottom line

If you encounter an unsafe situation, stop work immediately. A professional faller doesn't compromise safety. And the Regulation is on your side.

WorkSafeBC: We're here to help

Our prevention officers provide support by investigating work refusals. We deal with each situation on a case-by-case basis. We'll fully assess the situation to decide whether there was reasonable cause to believe an undue hazard existed.

For more information

To report an unsafe workplace, or for more information on your right to refuse unsafe work, please contact WorkSafeBC's Prevention Line at 604.276.3100 or 1.888.621.7233.

Supervisors and employers: What are your responsibilities?

It is your responsibility to create a culture of safety on your site where workers feel comfortable speaking up for safety, and trust that their concerns will be dealt with. If a worker identifies an undue hazard, you must stop production immediately and remedy the unsafe condition. You have options available for eliminating unacceptable dangers. Some alternatives include:

- Get assistance from a properly guarded machine
- Blast the danger tree
- Create a "no work zone" around the hazard
- Request a change to the block boundary
- Get the crew clear of other workers or phases

If you decide there's no undue hazard, you must be able to back up your decision and you must notify the worker who brought the hazard to your attention. But why take that chance? It's up to you to support your crew and go to bat for them when they report unsafe work. Their mental and physical well-being is your responsibility.

If the issue is unresolved, it's your responsibility to further investigate the problem with the worker and one of the following people:

- A worker representative from your joint occupational health and safety committee
- A worker selected by the union, if that applies
- Any other worker chosen by the employee who identified the hazard

If the issue remains unresolved after the joint investigation, you and the worker must report the matter right away to WorkSafeBC.