



Independent Review Panel Discussion Papers
on the
Workplace Health Safety
&
Compensation Commission

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Introduction

The New Brunswick Forest Products Association is a non-profit organization that represents its forest industry members by serving as a common voice in relations with the government and the public, promoting a healthy New Brunswick forest, raising public awareness of sustainable forest management practices, and providing a forum for the exchange of information, ideas, and concerns.

The NBFPA has over 80 members which are made up of pulp, paper, and solid wood manufacturing companies, as well as consultants, contractors, dealers, institutions, and individuals. It is the voice of the forest industry.

We wish to begin by stating that workplace safety is a top priority for our industry. Also, we believe that the WHSCC is a well run commission and that changes should not be made just for change sake. Continuous improvement of the system should be elaborated through communication and collaboration of the WHSCC and its stakeholders. And, any changes must not threaten the stability or sustainability of the system.

Creating a culture of safety

The ultimate goal, of course, would be to reduce workplace accidents to zero. But unfortunately, the reality is that work place accidents do happen. This being said, continually improving safety performances relies upon the creation of a culture of safety and the continuous collaboration of all stakeholders.

A prime example of this is the collaborative work being done between the New Brunswick Forest Industries Safety Association (NBFISA), forest companies and the WHSCC. Presently, NBFISA offers affordable and quality safety training to members of the industry's sawmills. NBFISA's efforts have been recognized and safety is part of the main-stream culture of sawmills in our province.

Forest operations are another workplace where safety needs to be top of mind at all times. Of course, safety training is part of the minimum requirements for operators to work in the woods. This training is offered by licensees and standards can change from license to license, thus creating challenges for the WHSCC to do its work properly. Recognizing this issue, the forest industry in collaboration with the WHSCC struck a committee to develop standards across the province for forest operations and NBFISA is presently working to develop a province wide standard safety program curriculum to address this gap. This is the type of collaboration that advances safety in the workplace in our province.

Accordingly, any changes in the compliance regime should promote collaboration between stakeholders and be focused on performance. Innovative approaches should be utilized to develop in order to deliver and finance such initiatives. However, employers

have the primary responsibility for safety and must maintain the authority to manage their operations in a safe, productive manner.

The safety culture can also be improved by enhancing the current outreach and education programs offered by the WHSCC. As examples, increasing supervisory and manager training, creating new worker videos and also developing web based and electronic resources for practical applications of Health and Safety knowledge and best practices would be positive.

Studies show that creating the right business climate increases investment in training. In this regard, incentives might be offered to firms who complete safety training. The government should be encouraged to offer tax deductions for undertaking specific WHSCC programs.

Case management

One area that requires attention in the “case management category” is the duration and cost of WHSCC claims as they are rising. The trends indicate that there is room for improvement in case management by the WHSCC. This trend could be slowed by allocation and application of resources that could streamline the claims management process. As an example, electronic claims submission and electronic funds transfer could be investigated as a means of improving the payment system. Furthermore, a faster return to work result in a more efficient and productive recovery and lower claims cost. In this sense, the WHSCC could consider developing “return to work” incentives for small employers.

Equally, enhancement to the appeals process could be considered as there is a growing backlog of cases. Steps should be taken to reverse this trend.

Financial performance

Presently, the WHSCC is in good financial health as it recorded \$ 138 M of excess and a funding ratio of 111% at the end of 2006. Assessments have risen very fast and rates are very high. Although, safety is essential and never put into question, employers do expect a return on investments in safety performance. At the very least, surcharges should be eliminated before considering enhancing benefits. Consequently, the cost of any improvements should be offset elsewhere in the system.

Lastly, administrative costs of the WHSCC have risen in the past few years. A comprehensive plan should be tabled to ensure control of administrative costs into the future.