



## REMOTE WORKSITES ARE SO MUCH RISKIER WITHOUT A SOLID EMERGENCY PLAN

As a former logging camp superintendent, and presently, as a WorkSafeBC senior regional officer, I've seen the varying results that come from having poor, mediocre, or excellent emergency evacuation plans (EEPs).

And what I've learned is that the willingness to accept less-than-excellent emergency plans can result in unintended consequences.

Consider this example from my past life: I recall receiving a call from the falling partner of an injured faller in a conventional falling block. The block had two points of entrance and the faller had neglected to indicate which end of the block they were working in. The faller had put his radio down and contact was lost. Crews requested a helicopter through air ambulance and constructed a

helicopter pad near the faller. A large air ambulance arrived on site but was much too large for the pad. So, the faller was packed out to the road, causing further delay. If we had known which helicopter

operation. Helicopter evacuation plans were put in place, a Billy Pugh transfer device purchased and workers were trained in the procedures. If a helicopter was requested, the specific machine

**Even if an ETV is not required, you still need a plan for transporting the injured worker. Using 911 on an EEP in a remote area is not acceptable.**

was going to arrive, he would have been at the road, packaged and ready to go.

This incident changed our plan considerably. Fallers, road crews, forest engineers, and rigging crews were then required to place pins daily on operational maps to indicate their locations. We followed a new set of procedures and relied on a flow chart developed for our

adapted for our spine board and length of long line was requested.

Our mechanics and dry land sort persons received training to be dispatchers, along with a list of questions to ask and times to record: whom they talked to, the ETA of the helicopter, radio frequencies we operated on, the injury to the worker and whether we wanted a paramedic dis-

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patched. We also had a procedure for calling BC Ambulance Service to request an ambulance at the hospital for moving the injured worker from the hospital helicopter pad to the hospital. We learned these lessons through experience. Ideally, forestry operations now have systems in place, so they don't need to learn from their mistakes.

Nonetheless, as we discovered, the fundamentals of an emergency evacuation plan must be specific to the work location. Responding to emergencies on southern Vancouver Island is far less complex than reaching isolated areas up the coast. A greater distance from hospital generally requires more planning, more worker training and more frequent testing of the procedure. And, since remote sites require more preparation and travel time, it's the responsibility of managers to operate with a higher standard of care. The bare minimum in the occupational first aid tables of Schedule 3-A may be legal, but is it sufficient? You need to ask yourself the question: "What if it were me lying there?"

## Prepare and Practice Your Plan

The Occupational Health and Safety Regulation requires written rescue and evacuation procedures and, at least, annual emergency drills. As an employer or first aid attendant, you should pay attention to this yearly minimum. If you've moved locations and encountered new voice communication methods, due diligence suggests conducting a new drill.

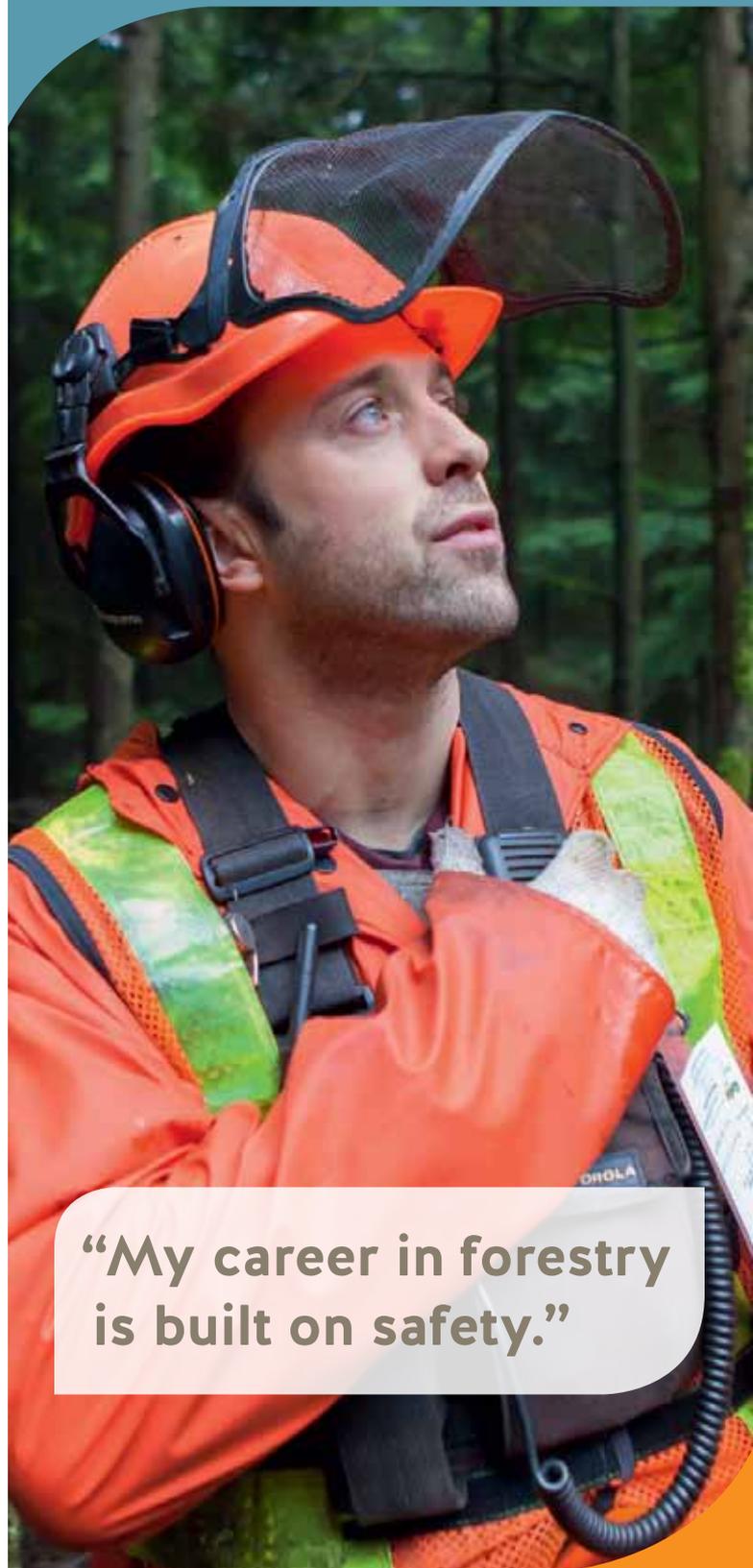
Given the wide range of forestry work and worksites, the Regulation cannot provide site-specific direction for developing emergency procedures. As previously mentioned, you need to customize the EEP to the area, include worker input and communicate it to all workers on site. Plans also need to take into account small operations. If you've ever packed a person on a stretcher through a logging block, you will appreciate that it's hard work. Know who is working around you and pre-arrange aid agreements between employers. Just because the first aid tables indicate that an ETV is not required, for example, you'll still need a plan for transporting the injured worker. Using 911 on an EEP in a remote area is not acceptable. The employer is responsible for pre-arranging transport.

As a WorkSafeBC officer, I ask about the written plan: Has the plan been discussed with the crew? Has the discussion been documented in the initial safety meeting? Are workers aware of the plan, and has it been tested? If air transport is the primary method of transportation, is daily communication checks and aircraft availability established prior to commencing work? What did the risk assessment deem a barrier to effective rescue? Is there a secondary plan in place? Are helicopter companies on the contact list aware they are on the list and will they respond (i.e., have you paid your last bill)? Is there sufficient oxygen on site to account for delays? Are the GPS co-ordinates correct?

During my 24 years with WorkSafeBC, I've seen significant improvements to EEPs. However, I still tell employers: "Continue to debrief after an incident and look for ways to improve the plan." Share your good plans with others. You will all be better prepared in an emergency. 🌲

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