

Explosion at MDF Plant in Quesnel



photo courtesy Erika Steinson via facebook

On March 9 at approximately 5:30 pm an explosion and fire tore through a section of the West Fraser WestPine medium-density fibreboard mill in Quesnel, B.C. All 30 employees who were working at the time were safely evacuated and volunteer firefighters were called in to battle the ensuing blaze.

Al Johnson, vice-president of prevention services, said while it's too early to speculate on the cause of the fire or explosion, they occurred in an area with four baghouses, or dust collection towers, that were either directly or indirectly involved. "There is wood dust and wood fibre in that area, so that may have been a contributing factor, but we don't know anything in detail at this point." Johnson said the mill had been part of a combustible dust inspection strategy that was developed following separate fatal explosions at sawmills in Burns Lake and Prince George in 2012. Four men were killed and 42 others injured in those incidents. He said medium-density fibre board or MDF facilities are slightly different from sawmills or pellet mills, but they have been part of the "journey and evolution" in the industry to deal with wood dust. WorkSafeBC has done about 10 inspections of WestPine since 2012 and it demonstrated it had a compliant program for management of combustible wood dust, he said.

Quesnel's mayor Bob Simpson said the explosion and fire badly damaged the side of the mill where raw material, such as sawdust, is fed into the plant. After speaking to the fire chief, he said it will take time to determine what caused the fire and where it started. "There was certainly an explosion outside of the building and the fire they had to fight initially was outside the building, but he indicated that doesn't mean that's where it started," he said. "They won't know where the original start was until they do a full investigation."

West Fraser's President and CEO Ted Seraphim said the incident occurred in the feed-stock area outside the plant's main production area. He added while the company is committed to repairing and restarting Westpine, that won't happen until "we complete our investigation, determine the root cause of what failed inside the MDF forming process equipment, and are confident we have the solution in place to ensure a similar incident can never happen again." Employees will remain on the job conducting cleanup and repair of the mill.

Coming Events

April 5 - 8 USW Policy Conference, Montreal, Que.

April 6 - 8 COFI Convention, Kelowna, BC

April 11-12 Western Conference on Safety, Vancouver BC

April 28 National Day of Mourning

April 30 Redshirt Walk to End Workplace Violence, Nanaimo BC

Logging Fatality on Northern Vancouver Island

It is with great sadness that we report that on February 26th Calvin Livingston, age 64 was killed in a tragic accident on the north end of Vancouver Island near Port McNeill. Calvin was a member of USW Local 1-1937.

Calvin was a Super Snorkel operator for a contractor who was working for TimberWest at their Bonanza Lake site near Port McNeill.

At the time of the accident the crew was moving the Super Snorkel on a lowbed to another location and were in close proximity to high voltage power lines.

WorkSafeBC, RCMP and the USW are investigating the accident.

Our sincere condolences go out to Calvin's family, friends and coworkers.



Calvin Livingston

Redshirt Foundation Completes Research into Workplace Violence



The SAFER Council, as well as union and management representatives from the forest industry, recently attended the Redshirt Foundation's research into workplace violence in sawmills in Nanaimo, BC.

Five BC sawmills from the coast and the interior participated in the research.

The research looked at among other things:

- What was the participants experience of workplace violence
- What are the drivers of workplace violence
- What degree can we stop workplace violence in sawmills.

We will be reporting out on the findings in detail soon.

HAZARD ALERT

Injury Type: Broken leg
Core Activity: Integrated forest management
Location: Vancouver Island/Coastal B.C.
Date of Incident: 2016-Feb

A certified hand faller was bucking a felled tree. He was struck, pinned, and seriously injured when the cut was completed and the logs separated. The faller was bucked out of the area by his falling partner, received emergency first aid on-site, and was then transported to hospital by helicopter.

Injury Type: Fatal
Core Activity: Pulp and paper mill
Location: B.C.
Date of Incident: 2016-Jan

The operator of a tractor pushing hog fuel off a stockpile was fatally injured when the tractor rolled down the edge of the pile.

Injury Type: Fatal
Core Activity: Log hauling
Location: Northern B.C.
Date of Incident: 2016-Jan
Two workers were attempting roadside repairs underneath a truck tractor on a resource road. One worker (a young worker) sustained fatal injuries when the truck slid onto him.

Injury Type: Facial lacerations
Core Activity:
Location: Interior B.C.
Date of Incident: 2016-Jan
A lift truck operator was transporting a load of 2x8s (13 feet long) within a sawmill. As he manoeuvred the lift truck, the load shifted, tipped forward, and spilled onto the ground. A nearby construction worker (working for a contractor) was hit by some of the spilled lumber.

Injury Type: Close call
Core Activity: Mechanized tree falling
Location: Vancouver Island/Coastal B.C.
Date of Incident: 2016-Jan
A feller-buncher (a machine on tracks equipped with a head to fall trees) was operating in a section of a cutblock with slopes 40 to 60 percent. As the operator was trying to overcome a falling difficulty, the feller-buncher slipped and rolled over, coming to rest with the cab on the ground. Another worker helped the feller-buncher operator, who was not injured, to exit the cab.

Injury Type: Fatal
Core Activity: Log hauling
Location: Interior B.C.
Date of Incident: 2016-Jan
An empty log transporter travelling on a public highway left the road surface at a corner. The truck rolled and struck a tree. The driver (a young worker) was fatally injured.

Eighty-Nine Percent say Wellness Programs Boost Happiness and Wellbeing

Almost nine in 10 (89%) employee respondents believe that taking part in workplace wellness programs improves their overall wellbeing and happiness, according to research by US health insurance provider Humana and the Economist Intelligence Unit.

Their research, *The wellness effect: the impact of workplace programs*, which surveyed 209 US employers and 500 employees, also found that 44% of employer respondents view workplace stress management programs as the most effective way of establishing a culture of wellness in an organisation.

The research also found:

67% of employee respondents say participation in wellness programs increases their engagement with their employer's mission and goals.

91% of employee respondents say that taking part in a wellbeing program improves their fitness.

69% of employee respondents agree that health and wellness are an important part of their organisation's culture.

Just 14% of employee respondents regularly participate in stress management programs, and 71% believe that wellness programs have had at least a moderate impact in lowering their stress levels.

Around half (46%) of employer respondents cite lack of time as the biggest obstacle to increased participation in wellness programs, compared to 51% of employee respondents.

Beth Bierbower, president of Humana's group segment, said: "About seven in 10 organisations in the US have been broadly successful in establishing a culture of wellness, and employee recognition of that effort is rewarding employers with increased productivity, retention and workplace engagement and improved morale.

"The survey findings suggest that employers who tailor well-designed wellness programs to specific employee needs, and then make them easily accessible in terms of time and location, achieve the highest positive impact.

"Another pervasive threat to wellness, and one that has not yet been adequately addressed, is work-related stress. Over half of employees believe work-related stress has taken a toll on their health. More formalised stress management programs must be a top priority for employers and employees in the future."

The USW and Forest Industry employers are planning the 2016 Forest Industry Wellness Conference for October 4 in Burnaby.

SWAY-A-LANA WALK
SATURDAY APRIL 30th, 2016
3:30-5:30 pm
Mafao Sutton Park
Nanaimo BC
Pledge sheets available
on Facebook.



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