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Coastal Forest Industry committed to continued improvements in safety

Vancouver – Members of the coastal forest industry are disturbed the Steelworkers union is using the issue of safety as a bargaining chip in the current round of labour negotiations.

“There is no disagreement in promoting safety. A culture of safety is important to everyone in the forestry sector—employers, employees and WorkSafe BC,” said Rick Jeffery, President and CEO, Coast Forest Products Association and a Director of the British Columbia Forest Safety Council. “Safety isn’t negotiable; we all need to work together to promote safe workplaces,” added Jeffery.

The Steelworkers have implied the flexible shifts that forest companies need in order to survive in this competitive environment somehow impact safety adversely. Shift work is not unique to the forest sector, in fact, one-fifth of North American employees work outside the standard 9-to-5-business day.

It is unfortunate that the union thinks injuries are related to alternate shifting. Clearly they haven’t done their homework on this vital issue. There is no statistical or operational evidence linking current shifts to safety performance in the forest industry. Indeed the facts tell a different story of sustained improvements.

The coastal forest industry is proud of their improving safety record and success in dramatically reducing fatalities and serious injuries in the coastal forestry sector.

In the last year, forestry was the only high-risk sector where safety was improving in a dramatic and sustainable manner. From a low point in 2005 of 43* fatalities to 12 forest fatalities in 2006, this is a signal that we are moving in the right direction. In 2007, the trend continues with a **35% decrease** in injuries and with no faller fatalities for over a year and a half.

“Safety is an important issue for all of us and shouldn’t be used as a pawn in a labour dispute. Instead, we need to ensure that the collective agreements allow companies to stay competitive and employees and contractors who depend on forestry continue to have safe, good-paying, stable jobs and communities continue to benefit from a strong and viable Coastal forest industry,” challenged Jeffery.

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*The 43 that is cited includes mills which are now tracked separately.
There were four fatalities in mills in 2005, one in 2006.

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