

Forest Products Manufacturers Establish Safety Task Force

British Columbia's wood products manufacturers have come together in an unprecedented collaboration to advance research and best practices in improving mill safety in response to the devastating explosions at Babine Forest Products and Lakeland Mills.

Until we receive the investigation conclusions from WorkSafe BC, we cannot say for certain what caused the events at those two facilities. However, we are told the investigation reports will take months and we feel strongly that the severity of the two incidents demands an immediate and comprehensive safety response. Four members of our sector lost their lives and we will not wait to take action.

On Wednesday, the CEO's from the major wood products manufacturing companies in British Columbia gathered to create an action plan for improving safety. Companies including Ainsworth, Interfor, Dunkley Lumber, Western Forest Products, Tolko, Sinclair Group, Hampton Affiliates, Conifex, West Fraser Timber and Canfor resolved to establish a CEO-led task force that will quantify combustion risks related to dust from processing both green and dry wood and identify best practices for dust mitigation from other industries that have issues related to dust in manufacturing.

We also committed to developing a set of clear and auditable standards that will be utilized to independently assess the safety of mills across the industry. We will work with experts across disciplines and other stakeholders to ensure these standards are comprehensive and can be relied upon to provide assurance that conditions in mills across British Columbia are safe for workers.

Finally, we will be reaching out to every forest products manufacturer in the province, large or small, to expand this initiative to every mill in British Columbia.

As the Task Force undertakes their work, each of our companies is taking proactive steps to mitigate all possible fuel and ignition sources in our mills. These significant steps began in January and all of our companies have implemented extensive measures to ensure safety. We welcome the support and collaboration of WorkSafe BC and appreciate government's swift action to visit every facility in the province. The collective efforts of industry and WorkSafe BC are delivering immediate improvements in safety performance across all British Columbia facilities.

As we mourn the lives lost and those changed forever by the explosions at Babine Forest Products and Lakeland Mills, we are taking every possible step to ensure that nothing like this ever occurs at another mill in this province again. We will be reaching out to government and labour to join with us in our efforts, and appreciate the continued support of our employees and our communities.

Don Kayne, CEO Canfor Corporation
Hank Ketcham, CEO West Fraser Timber
Brad Thorlakson, CEO Tolko Industries
Don Demens, COO Western Forest Products
Ken Shields, CEO Conifex