

**WOODLOTS**

**WHAT'S DIFFERENT**

**COMMON DIFFICULTIES**

**COMMUNICATION**

**ISOLATION**

**SUMMARY**

**INTRODUCTION**

Safety and Training in relation to Woodlot Logging. At first glance there is not much different about logging woodlots, it is just on a smaller scale (at present). But on closer inspection you find loggers working in woodlots having to deal with difficult harvesting situations all the time. They continually come across situations which some company contractors may only occasionally or never have to deal with. And in many situations these contractors are inexperienced and just starting out in business. Woodlot operations are often the first avenue into logging for many contractors and yet they need a wide range of skills at the outset, thus training should be an important aspect for them. Because many are just starting out in the industry, inadequate or older machinery is often common. Hence the term 'Cowboys' is associated with Woodlot operators. I feel 'Cowboys' is a term too widely used to describe private operators. Certainly there are some circumstances where the phrase applies or has applied in the past. But most Woodlot Operators are genuine contractors who are keen to improve their skills and do a professional job. But because, perhaps due to lack of experience, inappropriate machinery or an inappropriate rate for the job, safety can be compromised.

**SO WHAT IS DIFFERENT WITH WOODLOTS IN RELATION TO SAFETY AND TRAINING**

The main differences are:

- The difficult situations they often encounter
- Difficult trees - large heavy leaners

- Wire, obstacles
- Power wires
- Buildings
- 'Valuable', 'Historic' equipment

(SLIDES)

**COMMUNICATION**

Good people skills are essential. You may find you are dealing with several different people and their requests all at the same time. From the consultant wanting the most timber recovered to the farmer not wanting his fences damaged or a mess made of the paddock. Or caught between the woodlot owner and the present landowner (mediation skills come in handy here). Then there is the situation where the wife has a couple of trees around the house she would like down, or the neighbour wants a job done while you are in the area. Often these jobs are tricky and time consuming and are often done in a rush at the end of a job and not planned properly.

Good communication with the consultant/buyer is essential. Knowing your job prescription and what is expected of you at the beginning is important to getting the job right. Do not get pressure put upon you to do extra work and therefore take extra risks.

Conveying your obligation under the OSH Act is another area where you have to be diplomatic. It is your operation and as such you are responsible for what happens. Farmers/Woodlot owners are prone to wander over to have a look at proceedings and keep an eye on their carefully tendered trees, (and fair enough). But if you can provide them with a hard hat, tell them how to approach the operation (not to sneak up on the bushman)

and involve them in the operation, this will go a long way in reducing the risks to themselves and you also. Establishing a good line of communication right from start helps create a professional image which can flow on through the entire operation. It produces confidence in the Woodlot Owner and helps dispel the 'Cowboy' image.

#### **ISOLATION**

Not isolation in terms of location and inaccessibility, which is certainly a difference on its own. No forestry roads for easy access and reduction of trucking problems. In some cases the isolation and difficult access is a safety problem on its own. More important, I feel, is the situation many woodlot contractors find themselves in, is the isolation from information and training for the industry. Companies provide or insist upon training and have easier access to industry information and research (LIRO) than is the case in the private sector, and often private contractors are not up to date with new developments, are not using realistic costing structures or do not even know LFITB exist, let alone what it stands for.

If this isolation can be reduced it will go a long way to increasing the Safety and Training for woodlot logging.

#### **CONTINUITY OF WORK**

This is, in my opinion, the most important difference faced by woodlot operators. Not just in relation to safety and training but their very survival as contractors. If continuity of work can be put in place then successful training programmes can be established and safety issues (upgrading machinery) can be addressed. Workforce stability can be improved and therefore the benefits of training will be realised by the individual, the contractor, the consultants/company and the woodlot owner.

To achieve continuity of work we should look at:

- Better Planning - Woodflow, Markets
- Company Assistance - Companies interested in sourcing this increasing resource could take more responsibility for those contractors working in this area. Eg provide winter work, or work for them when market fluctuations occur. Companies may be able to provide follow up services such as land preparation, planting and roading with qualified and trained personnel thus increasing safety and promoting training.
- Woodlot Owners - Can insist on trained professionals to carry out their logging (which has been discussed earlier). Form co-ops and/or employ consultants to manage the harvesting and marketing of their resources.

#### **SUMMARY**

So in summary, the differences in woodlot logging in relation to Safety and Training are not so great. As the size of the private resources increases the differences associated with woodlot logging will decrease.

However, to minimise the differences that do exist there need to be a co-operative approach by all those involved, from the owner of the timber right through to the buyer. If a woodlot owner insists on a contractor being 'qualified' or a buyer insist that the trees be logged by a 'qualified' contractor then Training and Safety issues are automatically addressed.

Those in-between consultants and contractors themselves, need to be more aware of where training and advice can be obtained and utilise such organisations such as LIRO, LFITB.

With the rapid expansion of this large resource there is an increasing need for trained, skilled operators and I am sure with the co-operation of our industry we can meet this demand.