

From: E.Bitterman [removed for archive]
Sent: September 25, 2005 9:13 PM
To: ghamilton@png.canwest.com; ghamilton@png.canwest.com
Cc: Hansen, Ann
Subject: Sept 22 BC Forest workers killed on Job

September 26th, 2005

Vancouver sun,
Re: September 22nd, 2005 Article
G Hamilton
Suns Forestry Reporter

I have read your article dated September 22nd 2005, "27 BC Forest workers killed on the Job so far this year". My husband was employed in the logging industry, and was seriously injured on the job in 1999, he is one of the lucky ones, and I did not go to his funeral, but the events that followed the Accident are hard to believe by most. He went to work as usual on February 14th, 1999, upon shut down from the previous day my husband reported to his employer and fellow employees to remove all of the Danger trees from the section that he was in active operation. The next day, work commenced and the site was cleared for operation, but the Skidder did not remove the danger trees. A danger tree struck my husband, and it was unknown how long he was unconscious on the site, before he mustered enough will to crawl to the landing where his employer was working. He laid himself on top of the log deck to be sure that his employer saw him. His employer noticed him, and got him into the truck. The employer had no Evacuation Plan, but only a Level 1 kit and Level 1 First Aid training and was not prepared for a Major accident; the nearest hospital was 60 miles. He held his spine in traction bouncing over neglected highway by a handle in the pickup while his employer drove. Upon his arrival he was treated as he did not have any injuries. The doctor told us "all they see is an Old injury". He rolled around in the Fort St. John hospital for 3 days and given copious amounts of morphine to control the pain, assisted to get up to try to relieve himself, and fed meals. Three days later he was transferred to Dawson Creek where they had a cat scan. Immediately after the CAT scan which recognized the true Injuries, he was Immediately C-Collared with Spine control, spine boarded, and installed a catheter and Transported to Grande Prairie. Wage rate was to be established, and they take his entire fill in jobs during the summer while waiting the Logging season, since he was a 'seasonal' Worker, and reduce his wage rate to almost nothing. I am still left wondering what irrelevant jobs done in the summer awaiting your regular employment in a 'seasonal' industry has to do with your "long term" wage rate. An orthopedic specialist attended, and told him, he was "lucky" and had a close one. In the Interim WCB was effectively compensating and looking after the medical, until he reached a term called, "plateau". We were told that this is what determines that you are not getting any better or any worse. Without a functional assessment, and ignoring any doctors recommendations or recommending any guidelines they implemented, Return to Work. Still coping with 'Chronic pain', they force to try to find a job to support his family. In turn this forces me to work, to support my family. His spine further collapses and recorded by a visit to an orthopedic specialist. Homecare is recommended by three specialists but overruled by a Nurse advisor that does not have the qualifications of the Specialists that he has visited. His pain medication denied, his spinal brace denied, and Vocational rehabilitation determines as "uncooperative", since they do not follow any guidelines for rehabilitation that our Consultants or Orthopedic specialists outline. WCB determines him capable to RTW to any occupation, but he is taking large amounts of morphine to function, and they expect him to RTW even though there is a major risk to the Employer and Employee never mind the WCB and the Employers own regulations against Drug and Alcohol in the Workplace.

We have endured Video Surveillance, and it was used as an adjudication tool, or families privacy 'invaded', and my children, husband and I video taped. WE once worked in the forest and I am

appalled Donna Freeman can state that we have the Right to “REFUSE unsafe WORK”. When he went to work that day, he used every precaution to come home safe, he reported the unsafe hazard to his employer, due diligence was not practiced by the employer which caused this unfortunate event. Assistance in which we required after Injury is NON existent, to get around their obligations they have used Video surveillance without cause, used only excerpts of the claim manual to disallow while the next sentence allows the exception, forced me out of my home with young children to financially provide for my family, and pay for his medication and medical visits down south to specialists, not provided homecare that was recommended by three Professionals, without home maintenance causing us to live in a unmaintained home. I am writing this letter to you from work, while my husband copes at home with morphine. They did send him to the pain clinic for 10 days, which there was a marked improvement but after release there was no support and he quickly relapsed after one week. His medication that we just submitted for over 7 years that he has taken has just been ‘denied’, they ignore their own policy which I read for myself that “Dialudid” is covered by the board.

So Safety and the WCB and the logging industry? In my view it is protection for the Employer while the Employee battles for Compensation, and Rehabilitation. The Logging industry is a Risky business, and the Compensation rate reflects the hazard assessment. There seems to be more to this than the quote, “Dirty little secret”. Is the WCB creating false information by claim denial that there is ‘no’ problem in the Forest Industry?. There has to be a reason for the WCB under an “arms length” agreement with the BC government is crossing all barriers and in violation of the Canadian Human Rights legislation, and violating the Criminal Code of Canada, as well as the Canadian Constitution of Canada, and violating workers rights. Injured workers in the logging sector and other industries are not being adequately compensated and this is evident by my husbands past 7 years dealing with the Workers compensation board of BC. I am also under suspicion that if the real statistics and claim costs surfaced the Industry would come out of the dark ages and pressure would come to those who are to ensure safety in the forest.

The file and all this I can submit to you if you are interested in obtaining the Treatment of Injured Workers in the forest industry after serious injury.

Earlene Bitterman
Wife of an Injured Faller
Injured in a Logging Accident 1999
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