

Forestry fatalities – safety strategy needed

The recently-published findings of a 1990 ACC-funded study into New Zealand forestry call for a major increase in training to address the high incidence of fatalities among loggers and silviculture workers.

The report says fatalities among loggers is 28 times higher than that of the average New Zealand worker, and silviculture workers have a fatality rate double the national average. It also says New Zealand forestry workers appear to suffer more chainsaw injuries as a proportion of total work-related injuries than their counterparts in other parts of the world.

The research was coordinated by Dr Ruth Houghton, of the public policy centre of Otago University's Consulting Group, and Dr Ichiro Kawachi, then employed at the university's medical school in Wellington. The research was aimed at developing methods to reduce and prevent injuries.

The report recommends that training qualifications are recognised through remuneration, and that contractors who employ workers should be required to be

certified in forest work. It concedes that the responsibility for workers' safety has been clarified significantly since the 1990 study, but recommends that the effectiveness of these recent changes be monitored.

Because regular information about industry participants and operations would assist in policy development and encourage coordination among agencies responsible for occupational safety and health, a more comprehensive and centralised database should be developed.

Meanwhile, the just published results of a 1993 LIRO survey in forestry workers' attitudes to safety has found there is much ignorance about forest safety.

While the majority of the 465 interviewees agreed logging and forestry were dangerous, few were aware of the number of people killed or injured in the industry during 1992. Although the majority of companies had set safety goals, most people were unaware of the exact goal, or how their progress towards the goal was being monitored.

Attitudes towards responsibility were good, but there was a perceived lack of

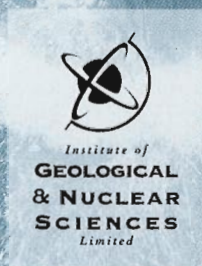
commitment to safety in the forest and logging industry: only 27% of managers and 14% of supervisors thought that the workforce would believe that the company was committed to safety.

Attitudes towards protective equipment were positive, although a number of workers were unaware of the benefits of more recently developed equipment, such as spiked boots and high visibility clothing. All contractors were aware of the Health and Safety in Employment Act (1992), but only 57% had a crew safety policy. Many workers were not aware of the HSE Act or safety policies.

Accident investigations and follow-up procedures are failing to prevent the same kind of accident reoccurring. Accidents are still being attributed to a lack of attention and carelessness. In doing this, the industry is accepting the hazards and blaming the worker. A more professional approach to accident investigations based on modern theories of injury causation need to be implemented.

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