

Update on forest safety initiatives

Fiona Ewing

After 10 forestry workers were killed on the job in 2013, an independent review drafted a blueprint for lifting the industry's safety performance. This plan included the creation of a peak body – the Forest Industry Safety Council – to champion safety improvements. A year on from its establishment, FISC National Safety Director Fiona Ewing provides an update on its work.

A few weeks ago, on a forestry site visit a crew foreman was enthusiastically telling me how much safety on-site has improved over the last three years. So I asked if he'd encourage his kids to go into forestry now. Immediately he said no, he'd still encourage them to get a trade, or do something else. For me that conversation summed up where we're at in forestry right now. There have been big improvements in safety over the last three years, but we have still got a way to go to make this industry a really attractive one to work in.

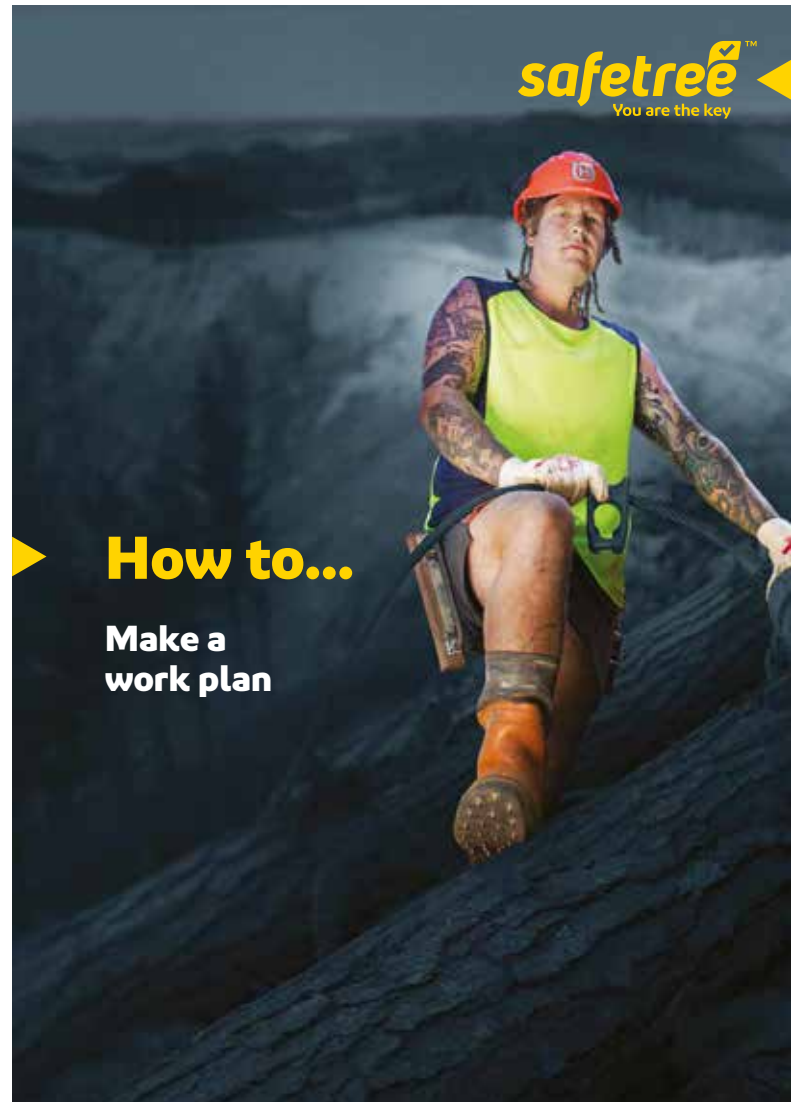
Independent Forestry Safety Review

It is no secret that forestry hit a low in 2013 when 10 workers were killed on the job. This prompted possibly the most thorough independent investigation into safety ever conducted in an industry in New Zealand, the Independent Forestry Safety Review (IFSR). The IFSR panel travelled around the country and heard from more than 540 forestry sector stakeholders. The panel's Agenda for Change report in 2014 provided a blue-print for transforming an industry that, at the time, injured twice as many workers as other sectors.

The report recommendations included improving leadership, worker engagement, regulatory guidance, competency and certification, and information sharing. They also included the creation of a pan-industry body to spearhead and coordinate these injury prevention activities. This body, the Forest Industry Safety Council (FISC), opened its doors in October last year. FISC is unique in New Zealand, being the only industry safety organisation governed by a council of representatives of industry, workers and government. This collaborative approach reflects the reality that real gains in safety performance are much more likely if everyone who influences safety on-site is involved and works together.

Five key projects

FISC has been given a big job. But working in our favour is the huge support we have had from the



sector, with many dozens of forest owners, managers, contractors, workers and union representatives all giving their time to support our work. We have also had strong support from WorkSafe and ACC – who together with the forest industry fund FISC's activities. The current focus of these activities is five key projects that stem from IFSR recommendations and that will deliver useful resources relatively quickly. Most of these projects build on work already underway in the industry.

Individual competency and certification

Through our safetree.nz website and Facebook page FISC is promoting industry-approved competency assessment tools for the high-risk tasks for head breaker out, tree felling and breaker out. These free, downloadable assessments are a great way to keep workers' skills up-to-date, particularly if they were trained a while ago.

We have also launched Safetree Professional Forest Worker Certification. This user-pays (but affordable) scheme provides official recognition from the industry that a worker has been independently assessed on the job as able to work safely and professionally. Just under 70 workers have received Safetree certification and we expect this number to grow rapidly in 2017.

Contractor Certification scheme

This scheme will be formally launched in early 2017, following a pilot this year, and will improve both safety and working conditions for foresters. The scheme offers forest owners and managers a formal assurance that the contracting companies they are hiring are competent to do the job.

It will help contracting companies by providing a transparent benchmark that their health and safety systems can be designed to. Importantly, it has the potential to prevent pre-qualification hassles by offering the forestry sector a single certification scheme that can be used by everyone, rather than the multitude of schemes that operate in some other sectors. To become certified, contractors will complete a web-based assessment and a field audit. The scheme, which will also be user-pays, is currently being trialled by several contractors. Their feedback will be used to make refinements before it is rolled out next year. Information about worker and contractor certification is available on safetree.nz.

Growing our safety culture

The IFRS highlighted worker participation and strong leadership as cornerstones of good health and safety. With that in mind FISC is revamping, and will promote, the *Safety Culture Tree* tool originally developed by the industry and ACC in 2009. The tool works on attitudes towards safety amongst crews, reveals what is really going on on-site, and supports crew and their managers to come up with a plan for improvements. This focus on attitudes is important – given they drive day-to-day practices.

The tool has been used with considerable success by forest owner/manager Blakely Pacific, which has seen a significant improvement in attitudes towards safety that has contributed to a downward trend in lost-time injuries in recent years. A video and written case study about Blakely Pacific's experiences are on our safetree.nz website. These are an easy read/watch and I would highly recommend everyone working in forestry to look

at them. The tool is being updated to reflect the latest safety learnings and will be re-launched in early 2017.

Another case study is also about to be loaded onto the site where Hancock Forest Management talk about how training front-line staff in leadership skills has led to significant and measurable improvements. In particular, the relationships between crew managers and Hancock supervisors has strengthened, helping the company meet its duties under the Health and Safety at Work Act to work with its contractors on health and safety.

Learning from incidents

In addition to using the safetree.nz website as a vehicle to share leanings from incidents, we have a project that is looking at how we can extract more useful information from incident investigations. Traditional approaches to incident investigation focus on 'what' happened – which provides useful information. But they don't always uncover 'why' the incident happened – information that is also very useful to prevent future occurrences.

FISC has, with the assistance of WorkSafe, commissioned research by Scion to use a 'learning review' approach to investigations developed by the US Forest Service to better understand the 'context' surrounding an incident.

In addition to providing tips that will help the industry conduct better investigations itself, Scion is applying this new approach to investigations of real-life forestry incidents. The findings will help us understand the context of the incidents (why they happened as well as what happened), and help the industry better understand how to prevent similar incidents in future.

Risk management

This project is about encouraging the industry to move from focusing on 'hazard identification' to promoting control of critical risk areas. I have been on sites where the hazard register runs to more than several hundred hazards. Registers like that are too long to manage. So much effort goes into identifying and recording every hazard that little time is left to actually manage them. Critical risks – the ones that can kill or permanently harm people – also get swamped by the sheer volume of hazards and do not get the attention they require.

Research suggests that the critical risks we should be focusing on in our industry are:

- Tree falling
- Breaking out
- Skid site operations (man/machine interaction)
- Driving vehicles
- Repair and maintenance of machinery.

So this project is about providing tools and resources to help people manage these critical risks as a priority.

Further information

The five projects above will be profiled at the Forest Safety Summit in March 2017. In the meantime, FISC will continue to provide safety and performance information to the sector through safetree.nz. Those who go to the website and sign up for our newsletters get regular emails with the latest resources and information. I would encourage everyone who works in forestry to do this.

This information includes easy-to-understand guides on how the Health and Safety at Work Act applies to forestry, along with templates, posters, videos and booklets that can be used for planning, inductions, safety workshops and tailgate meetings.

Importantly, the site also includes a dashboard that summarises our current performance on health and safety. The latest dashboard reflects the gains in safety performance made since 2013. But it also shows a rise in injuries in the latter part of 2016 – an unwelcome trend. Reversing that trend for 2017 is an achievable goal – the forestry sector has shown before that we can improve our performance when we focus on health and safety. It is also essential if we want to build a sustainable and productive forestry industry – one we're happy for our kids to work in.

Fiona Ewing is National Safety Director of FISC based in Wellington. Email: fiona.ewing@fisc.org.nz.

Letter to the editor

Quality assurance plots

Wink Sutton

The paper in the *NZ Journal of Forestry*, 61(1): 39–40 by Robin Trewin on 'Forest establishment quality assurance' plots understates their importance and usefulness. These plots should be established close behind planting gangs by an independent, experienced forester so that bad planters can immediately be identified and recalled for a re-plant (re-work). If the planting stock is not to specification (roots trimmed too short or long, stripped of soil and mycorrhizas or stem diameters too small) the supplying nursery is at fault. Then the forest owner should not have to pay for the poor planting stock that are incorrectly planted (planting site not cleared, trees planted too shallow or simply stuffed in the ground, or not planted using the positive pull up method ensuring that all roots are downward facing, or bad handling i.e. being crushed in planting box). In this case, the contractor's supervisor is at fault and must have errant workers replant properly.

After planting, the young tree will sometimes develop a lean (topple) in gale force winds, especially when wind is accompanied by soil and root loosening

heavy rains. However, if correctly planted with roots orientated down, good deep penetrating roots soon develop to anchor stems firmly so that leaning trees quickly recover and grow straight. Further, if tree stocks are of a good quality (as well as carefully harvested, packaged, transported, stored on the planting site and planted) then growth problems, including toppling damage, are less likely.

Correctly planted trees can greatly avoid future growth and stand stability problems. Why don't all involved (the nursery, the planters and the forest owner) insist on quality assurance plots being established by reputable foresters? If this is done potential future problems can be immediately identified and corrected, ensuring good growth and final crop quality. Since those responsible for any establishment deficiencies can be identified, why don't liability insurance companies offer a reduction in premiums of 10% to 20% if quality assurance plots are established? The insurance companies as well as the forest owner could benefit greatly.