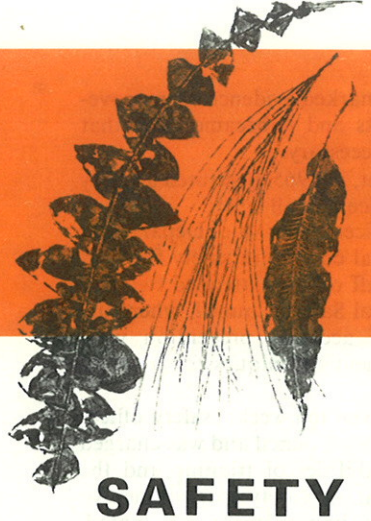

INFORMATION SHEET 24

SAFETY IN FORESTRY OPERATIONS

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Forestry, due to its variety of operations, has always been recognised as one of the most difficult fields in which a successful accident prevention programme could be applied.

Although the Forests Department had been aware for many years of the accident problem and its effects in forestry operations and the timber industry in general, such safety precautions that were undertaken were largely directed at guarding unsafe machinery and equipment.

It was generally accepted that because of the many dangers associated with the numerous jobs performed, that accidents just had to happen, and for the workmen to remain free from injury depended on the skill with which they used their tools of trade—and lots of luck.

This somewhat fatalistic outlook during the years prior to 1967 resulted in the unenviable safety record of 184 disabling injury accidents a year. (A disabling injury accident is an accident which results in the injured worker being declared unfit for work for a full day or more following the day on which the accident occurred.)

In addition a further 500 serious injury accidents were sustained. (A serious injury accident is one which requires medical attention but does not result in lost time other than that incurred by receiving medical attention.)

Add to these the countless minor injuries sustained, such as cuts, abrasions, insect bites etc., and it can be seen that the accident problem was indeed a matter of concern, not only from the humanitarian angle, but also from the production angle. Experience throughout industry has proved beyond doubt that accidents are a major factor in production loss. Perhaps if we examine these two areas more fully we will gain a better appreciation of their importance.

Let us look then at how an injury accident affects the injured worker.

Firstly there is the actual pain and suffering, the degree of which depends on the nature and seriousness of the injury. From the minor pain and discomfort of a splinter in a finger to the agonising pain of broken bones or a severed limb. Nothing can ever compensate a person for the pain suffered as a result of injury. Secondly there is the loss of earnings which results when a worker loses time because of an accident.

Although all workers are insured, the amount of money they receive while they are off work through injury is less than their normal wages, and it is here where an accident to Dad is felt in the home by Mum and the rest of the family.

In most cases it is found that because of the loss of wages we are forced to do without certain luxuries that we have been used to.

How many of us have had this humiliating experience all through an accident?

Thirdly there are those cases where because of a permanent disability as a result of an accident, Dad, a skilled worker on very good wages finds on his return to work that he is unable to do the job that he was doing when he was injured, and so is found a job that he can do, but at a much reduced rate of pay. This situation has often resulted in Mum, and sometimes the children, having to find a job. So it can be seen that nothing can ever make good in full the various losses to the victims of occupational accidents and that positive measures to prevent accidents is fully justified on humanitarian grounds alone.

Having looked at the costs to the victim of an accident, let us now look briefly at the costs to management.

Many people are of the opinion that the sole costs to management of on-the-job accidents is the money that is paid to cover workers' insurance.

Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact such amounts are only a small proportion of the total costs of industrial accidents.

It has been established throughout industry the world over, that the actual cost of an accident can be found by first determining the direct—or known costs—such as insurance and other costs incurred in accident prevention work, and multiplying them by the indirect—or hidden costs such as medical costs, investigating costs, property damage and lost working time etc. These indirect costs are found to be four times as much as direct costs and so when this ratio of 4 to 1 is applied we find that the actual costs of accidents are enormous.

Statistics Summary

	1961-7	1967-8	1968-9	1969-70	1970-1	1971-2
Disabling injury accident/year	184	124	96	70	48	41
Manpower	904	908	1 000	980	988	962
Man-hours worked/year	1 808 000	1 895 000	2 020 000	1 901 020	1 808 406	1 759 888
Man-days lost/year	2896	1701	1738	721	458	275

For example, if the direct costs in the Forests Department were $50000 a year we can say that the actual costs were $200000 a year.

To demonstrate the enormous costs of industrial accidents still further, let us look at the cost to Western Australia.

Estimates based on accident figures for the year ended June 30th, 1972, show that in Western Australia 29685 workers were injured; 374860 man-days were lost, and that 18 people died, all as a result of industrial accidents.

Some $5725154 was paid out in claims for wages lost, hospital, medical expenses, and lump sum settlements (direct costs). Now by applying the ratio of 4 to 1 we find that the indirect costs amounted to $22900616 or approximately $771 an accident.

When we consider the heavy costs which must be borne by the victim of an accident, the organisation and the State, the need for accident prevention is made very clear.

So having become aware that it was necessary, from a number of points of view that something could and should be done about accident prevention in forestry operations, the Conservator of Forests looked for some ways to tackle the problem.

As a start it was decided to seek the advice of Safety Training Officers from the Industrial Section of the National Safety Council (now known as Industrial Foundation for Accident Prevention), and it appeared that the logical first line of attack lay through the safety education aspects.

The techniques used in this phase of safety development include:

1. Training supervisors to develop their skill in accident prevention.

   This is very important, as a supervisor being a person who is placed in charge of workers must fully understand how to apply the basic principles of accident prevention if he is to succeed in reducing on-the-job accidents.
2. Making supervisors primarily responsible for accident prevention in the areas under their control.
3. Thorough safety induction of workers under their control.
4. Systematic safety inspections.
5. Personalised safety instruction.
6. Intense accident investigation.
7. Regular safety contacts.
8. Safety committees at various levels to serve as a media for both upwards and downwards safety communication.

There was, however, no marked evidence of improvement following these efforts and it became clear that more dynamic action was necessary.

Therefore the Department, in 1965, instituted a safety training programme for officers at all levels.

The Safety Liaison Officer from the Department of Labour conducted several courses in safety for field staff officers, and senior staff officers attended two-day sessions held by the National Safety Council, where the principles and benefits of accident prevention were outlined and the management techniques for a safety campaign were identified.

In 1967 an officer was given ten weeks' safety officer training at the National Safety Council and was charged with the full time responsibilities of training and the field promotion of a well planned safety programme. An immediate and spectacular improvement was noted. Time lost through disabling injury accidents has shown a startling drop from an average of 2896 man-days in 1959-66 to 275 in 1971-2. A saving of 12 man years. This result brings with it many benefits, both tangible and intangible:

Twelve less houses are required

Three motor vechiles are no longer necessary.

Lost time is reduced together with time lost by workmates associated with each accident.

Less time is spent in training extra men.

Safety training places a spotlight on supervisors, supervision standards and work methods.

Communication between staff and employers improves and there is a marked increase in morale and general efficiency.

Maintenance and care of departmental assets improves as a result of safety demands for good housekeeping and the removal of hazards.

Peace of mind for management, the worker and his family results in improved employee/employer relationships.

The table shows the reduction in accidents from 184 to 41 and in man days lost from 2896 to 275 over the five year period of the safety programme.

Economically there have been major savings from safety in the W.A. Forests Department. Uninsured or indirect costs of accidents such as delays, interruptions to work, etc., as already discussed, are enormous and it is estimated that the reduced accident occurrence has resulted in these costs being reduced from $165000 to $100000 a year. Insurance rates for accident compensation have dropped, and this year, 1972-3, $30000 less will be paid in insurance premiums, compared to 1967 when the campaign was initiated.