

# **SAFETY SAVES**

*We recently received* an interesting article from a member in the Missoula area that provides the impetus for this month's thoughts pertaining to logging safety.

As we often mention during our annual first aid workshops, the vast majority of logging crews are doing an exceptional job with respect to safety, loss control and accident prevention... and we are pleased to note that with respect to frequency and severity of accidents, this seems to be a national trend.

According to national statistics, attention to safety and loss control appears to be paying dividends. Time lost due to workplace injuries dropped by 54.9 % between 1991 and 2008. That is an amazing statistic... and one which prevails across all industries, geographic regions and companies regardless of their size.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of this positive trend, however, there is troubling evidence that these measures of improvement are beginning to stall.<sup>2</sup> In 2007, for example, more than 5,600 workers were killed on the job and more than 4 million were injured.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the pain and suffering of workers and their families... and in addition to the loss of operational productivity and efficiency... the cost to employers is tabulated at an astonishing \$48.6 billion.

And that leads us to this month's thought: *Due to the current economic malaise, the workforce—and especially contracting firms—are challenged to produce more for less.*

This is not specific to the logging industry. Every industry in which contract work is the standard is plagued by the simple fact that too many contractors are chasing too few contacts... and that means that bidders have to sharpen their pencils if they want to stay in business.

*The consequence of such an economic reality is that the temptation to “cut corners” is dangerously alluring.*

There are several considerations that go into the bidding process that may allow a contractor to try and skimp by for a short period of time... but attention to the tenets of safety and loss control is not one of them.

Logging contractors especially have advanced professionalism in recent decades beyond any expectation... and it would be foolish on so many levels to let our guard down during these economically trying times.

We fully understand the challenges of surviving in this market... and we fully realize that many of the challenges are beyond your control. It is the challenges that are within your control that we are encouraging you to maintain your professional commitments.

As this new logging season unfolds, the MLA safety rangers are visiting your jobs. [In fact, a few of you may be seeing more of us than you bargained for.] Nonetheless, we are very much aware of the legitimate concerns of the majority of logging and hauling contractors about the continuing need to work for little more than expenses... and that's a red flag for your safety rangers.

We have lost count of the number of times we have heard the comment... “I just hope nothing major breaks down cuz the money is not there to fix it.” We can't do much about equipment failure... but we will do everything in our power to help make sure your crew is both safe and productive.

The majority of economic forecasters say we are on a long and slow road to economic recovery... so we are going to live with tough times for a while yet. So what can we do? 1). The logging industry has always had a “GET IT DONE” attitude, but don't let unsafe practices justify tight deadlines.

2). Avoid “JUST THIS ONCE” unsafe practices... these are acts, justified as exceptions to the rule.

3). Be a “TEAM PLAYER”... don't allow unsafe practices or situations that are justified for the good of the company... allow everyone to speak up when safety lines are crossed—no matter who crosses them; and

4). Don't neglect the maintenance on machines, equipment and trucks... the cost may seem prohibitive now, but the cost of doing nothing could be tragic later.

Let's make sure everyone gets home safe every day... because in good time or in bad times... ***Safety Saves.***

1. “Workers Compensation Claim Frequency Continues Its Decline in 2008,” Tony DiDonato, Matt Crotts, and Melissa Brown, NCCI Research Brief, July 2009.

2. DiDonato et al, p.1.

3. 2008 Workplace Safety Index, Liberty Mutual Research Institute for Safety, 2008.