



## ***For young workers, getting a job is an upset condition***

The most common pivotal point between on-the-job safety and worker injury is decision-making prompted by an upset condition — any event that interrupts a normal process and leads a worker to make a choice outside his or her routine, according to Peter Lineen, manager of safety and environment for Western Forest Products Inc. (WFP).

The upset condition plays a major role in a new five-year safety strategy launched early this year. It will also be implemented at all Cascadia Forest Products operations, acquired as of early May to run under the WFP name with a combined work force of 3,500 logging, sawmill and remanufacturing employees.

“We are targeting decision-making generally and upset conditions specifically,” Lineen says, noting higher risks whenever people must deviate from normal working routines—“for instance, stopping to fix a piece of sawmill equipment.”

Lineen points to research showing that “this is when you’re 35 times more likely to be injured.” The distraction causes a tendency to lose concentration, and prevention requires showing workers how they create unsafe conditions for themselves and teaching them to avoid it.

“We’re investing a lot of our training, coaching and leadership time here,” he says, stressing that new and young workers need it even more than experienced employees.

“For workers without much experience, just getting a job is an upset condition that is affected by personal values, preconceived ideas about the workplace and how they will fit in,” Lineen says.

“We must be sensitive to how we coach and mentor these individuals, and what kind of sign-off we use as a demonstration of their competency, knowledge and skills.” He sees a multi-stage orientation-and-training process for most WFP workplaces.

- ▶ An introductory session with the senior manager and a supervisor covers basic expectations and expresses their beliefs and values about workplace safety.
- ▶ Basic classroom and site instruction “geared to the flow of work and safe operating procedures” with a focus on dealing with upset conditions.
- ▶ Assignment to a specific work area with regular co-workers designated as buddies or mentors for individual young workers.
- ▶ Supervisors testing young workers’ skills and knowledge of safe work practices against certain standards at regular intervals.

Built into all that and the routine forming their day-to-day working lives must be key messages continually reinforced for young workers. They need to understand that:

- Their decision-making can lead to injury and they have rights to ask questions and to stop production because of safety concerns.
- Communications with supervisors are always two-way and open.
- Working harder or faster isn’t necessarily better.
- Discipline may result from breaching cardinal rules like those for fall protection, locking out energized machinery and wearing vehicle and mobile equipment safety belts.

“What’s critical is that the individuals accountable for coaching and supervising young workers bring the right values and skills and sensibilities to those functions,” says Lineen.

“We need to take the time to find good communicators who understand the work and control its risks correctly, who can empathize with young workers and, no less important, who will treat them as their own kids.

I know they’re there. I can name a lot of them at Western Forest Products.”