

Safety Training in the Forestry and Petroleum Industries

Prepared for the
Northern Labour Market Information Clearinghouse

July 1996

Introduction

Safety training is a major part of industrial training in northern Alberta, as elsewhere. Most employees in the forestry and petroleum sectors have some level of safety training either taken prior to employment or provided by their employer. Among other courses, this training usually includes First Aid and CPR, H2S Alive and Workplace Hazardous Materials Information Systems (WHMIS). All northern Alberta post-secondary institutions offer some safety courses, as do a number of private firms.

This report is in response to an interest on the part of Clearinghouse partners in exploring further opportunities in this area. This report attempts to answer two main questions. First, what specific courses might make up a broad “safety passport” program that would satisfy the needs of a variety of employers, and is there a demand for such a program? Secondly, is there a demand for a locally-delivered Loss Control Management program and are companies willing to work with the colleges to develop such a program?

While employees in a wide range of industries need safety training, this report focuses on the forestry and petroleum sectors as they create most of the demand for safety training in northern Alberta.

Methods

The bulk of the information for this report comes from a survey of human resources and safety officers at several forestry and petroleum companies operating in northern Alberta. Additional information came from interviews with others involved in industrial safety and in training.

Existing Training

As mentioned above, industrial safety training is available from a wide array of sources. Standard courses such as WHMIS, H2S Alive and first aid are offered by all of the Clearinghouse partners either as stand-alone courses or as part of larger training programs. Safety courses are also offered by most post-secondary institutions in the province and by many private firms. Driving safety courses such as Transportation of Dangerous Goods (TDG) and Defensive Driving are also available from many institutions and companies.

Lakeland College already offers a Health and Safety Passport including Occupational Health and Safety Orientation, Standard First Aid, H2S Alive and WHMIS. The demand for this package fluctuates. In the past, agencies such as HRDC have purchased seats in this program for their clients. Corporate clients are more likely to purchase seats in individual courses than in the entire package. In spite of the reduced cost in comparison to taking all of the courses individually, few individuals sign up to take the package prior to employment. Grande Prairie Regional College delivers most of their safety training on a contract basis, estimating that only 5% of their safety courses are taken by individuals prior to employment.

Loss Control Management courses are generally provided by or brokered from private companies such as International Loss Control Institute or DNV of Atlanta, Georgia. Companies generally have to send staff away to major centres to take this training or have employees take it by correspondence.

The University of Alberta offers a program directed toward employees who are responsible for health and safety in their workplace. Most students in this program have some post-secondary training before beginning the program although this is not a prerequisite. This program is available through Grande Prairie Regional College and Lakeland College.

Demand for courses

The employment outlook is good for both the forestry and petroleum sectors in northern Alberta. While increased use of technology will reduce the workforce needed at each facility, new investment, particularly in oil and gas, will likely produce a moderate increase in employment over the next few years.

Table 1 (below) shows the results of a survey of several employers in the petroleum and forestry industries. Displayed are their responses to the question, “What are the most important safety-related courses for your employees to have taken (those most needed by the largest number)?”

There is a much greater demand for safety training in the petroleum industry than in forestry. Most petroleum companies prefer their new employees to have a standard set of safety courses, generally requiring WHMIS and H2S Alive. Oil and gas companies are also more interested in having employees trained prior to employment. Joanne Bryeide of Precision Drilling said that it would be a “definite advantage” for an applicant to have safety training and that anyone who is serious about working in the industry should take safety courses on their own. Even so, most petroleum companies do provide some training themselves, relying on a mixture of in-house trainers, colleges and private training companies.

There is also greater potential for co-operative training programs in the oil and gas sector than in forestry. Contacts in oil and gas companies generally said that most of the desired courses could be provided in a general program or at least one common to the petroleum industry. Suncor and Syncrude already co-operate on site orientation training.

Companies in the forest sector were less likely to identify specific safety courses as being important. Forestry companies that do identify safety training needs are also more likely to train their employees “on-the-job”. While industry firms recognize general courses in First Aid and CPR, contacts stated that most other courses have to be site-specific.

Table 1: Safety Courses Identified as the Most Important by Companies Surveyed

Course Company	1st Aid	CPR	H2S Alive	WHMIS	TDG	Confined Space Entry	Firefighting	Defensive Driving	Other
Crestar	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
International Colin Energy	X		X						
Norcen	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Precision Drilling	X		X	X					
Suncor	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	
Syncrude	X			X	X				
Trigil	X	X	X	X	X				
Ainsworth	X					X	X		
Alberta-Pacific	X			X		X	X	X	Safe Lockouts
Buchanan	X			X					Safe Lockouts
DMI	X	X		X					
La Crete Sawmills	X			X					Chainsaw safety
Northland F.P.*									
Tolko*									First Response
Weyerhaeuser				X					Chainsaw safety

* Northland Forest Products stated that they were too small a company to engage in safety training beyond the on-the-job training in the operation of their machinery. Tolko Industries has an extensive training program for their new employees involving all aspects of the plant's operations.

The Peace Arch Project, a cooperative development and educational initiative involving oil companies, native communities and government, has established a training program to help aboriginal people find employment in the petroleum industry. A significant part of this training is a set of safety courses including WHMIS, H2S Alive, First Aid, TDG, Defensive Driving and Confined spaces Entry. ATV safety and chainsaw safety are also seen as useful course to have.

Precision Drilling is looking to work with northern colleges to develop a safety program that would provide them with a good pool of potential employees who have a set of basic skills and knowledge and whom they can then train in the specifics of their operation.

Alberta Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) has few regulations or standards in place regarding safety training but are planning to look into this over the next year. This is at a time when the general trend is away from government regulation towards industry self-regulation. Accordingly, OH&S task teams plan to work with industry to develop training standards.

Loss Control Management

The companies surveyed were almost unanimous in their interest in locally delivered Loss Control Management training. Most currently deal with training companies from outside of the region, sending staff away for training or having them train by correspondence. Almost all of the contacts are interested in working with northern colleges to develop locally-delivered programs.

Implications for Training

The demand for safety training in northern Alberta is strong, particularly from the oil and gas industry. There are however, many players in the field. One very promising opportunity in this field is for colleges to work together and with companies such as Precision Drilling to develop standardized programs that can become recognized as essential for employment in the industry.

A standardized safety training package could have the following core courses:

- First Aid (including CPR)
- H2S Alive
- WHMIS

Optional courses could include:

- Transportation of Dangerous Goods
- Confined Space Entry
- Firefighting
- Defensive Driving

There is a strong opportunity for northern colleges to develop a locally-delivered Loss Control Management (LCM) program, particularly one that is geared toward local conditions and facilities. While the companies would welcome any proposals from northern colleges to develop LCM programs, the tone of their responses suggests that they are unlikely to initiate the process themselves.

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