



August 21st, 2019

The Honourable Harry Bains
Minister of Labour
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

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Dear Hon. Minister Bains:

RE: Helicopter Emergency Medical Services for Workers in Remote or Difficult Access Sites

The Truck Loggers Association, the Interior Logging Association and the Western Forestry Contractors' Association represent British Columbia's timber harvest and reforestation contracting sectors. We employ 25,000 forest workers who log, truck, survey, engineer and reforest across the province. Our members collectively represent the supply chain for the forest industry and without them, there is no forest industry in the province. Most of the 140 communities in this province continue to persist today through the hard work and dedication of our member companies and their employees.

We are writing this joint letter asking for increased support of helicopter emergency medical services (HEMS) that our employees deserve while working in remote or difficult access sites. In particular we want to draw attention to the HEMS model provided by Technical Emergency Advanced Aero Medical (TEAAM), based in Squamish. This is a group that has been attempting to provide this much needed service for the forestry sector, as well as other sectors such as mining, oil & gas, and tourism, for the last two years.

All of our organizations are founding members of the BC Forest Safety Council (BCFSC). As employer groups we strive to make our industry's workplaces as safe as possible. We believe our industry's success in substantively reducing fatalities over the last decade is evidence of that primary commitment. We believe providing HEMS is a timely step towards our industry reaching its goal of zero fatalities and reducing the traumatic impacts of serious injuries.

The majority of our crews work on remote or difficult access locations throughout British Columbia. Because of the extended time it takes to extract and transport patients from the site to emergency medical care, they risk worse consequences for their injuries. The "Golden Hour" is a concept that is well documented to show faster emergency response times greatly increase the probability of an injured worker surviving a workplace injury and minimizing the impact of serious injuries. This is reflected in BC Forest Safety Ombudsman Roger Harris's 2017 report *Will It Be There? A Report on Helicopter Emergency Services in BC* as well as being mentioned in a number of *TruckLogger BC* magazine articles on work safety.

The Ombudsman points to the tenet of emergency medicine that the sooner someone can be stabilized and treated, the lower the risk of severe complications, the shorter the recovery times and the less treatment and compensation costs. There are few situations in this province where an injured forest worker could be in an emergency ward within an hour under current response regimes. In most cases it would be well beyond that time. If HEMS were in place it could shorten response times saving lives and limbs—this is what TEAAM offers.

For these reasons our associations have all made improving workplace emergency response preparation and practice a strategic priority. Part of that work has led to our collaboration in promoting TEAAM to our members, along with agency and government decision-makers. TEAAM representatives have spoken at our conferences and workshops. Their service has been featured in our trade publications as well as a feature article in the BCFSC's *Forest Safety News* describing TEAAM's part in attending and transporting a seriously injured faller from a coast block last year:

http://www.bcforestsafe.org/files/ForestSafetyNewsletter_2019February.pdf

The public has also shown an interest with a CBC News story last month covering TEAAM's extrication of a seriously injured tree planter from a difficult access site near Squamish:

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/helicopter-rescue-sea-sky-1.5193307>

Again, this summer another significant TEAAM mission was executed involving treating and transporting a seriously injured tree planter from a work site in the Chilcotin. The nature of the injury, an open fracture, and the remote location suggest that TEAAM's response on site with the shortened transportation time may have saved the worker from being permanently disabled. As we are writing this we have just heard of a fourth mission involving a faller with a broken femur being long lined off a remote worksite and flown directly to a trauma centre.

Even though TEAAM has only been in place for a year, operating from one base, with a private patronage program that has yet to be fully subscribed, they have already made a significant difference in reducing the consequences to seriously injured workers in our sector. It is their ability to fly distances over terrain to deliver emergency medicine, helicopter extrication capacity (including hoist), and hazardous materials management to an incident that sets them apart. Their operating model can **deliver sophisticated emergency medical care to the patient directly on site**. This is in contrast to the traditional scheme where ambulances, or available helicopters, in some cases, primarily transport the patient to medical care at the emergency ward, often creating lengthy times before the patient actually receives the higher level of attention, and potentially increasing negative outcomes.

The current model of injured patient transport from remote work sites involves several modes of transport and transfers between transporters and first aid attendants (helicopter, boat, pickup truck, search and rescue, fire/rescue, ambulance, etc.). This is unacceptable. Additionally, the 911 call centers are not experienced or equipped with the resources to effectively communicate and coordinate a seriously injured worker from a remote work site to a hospital. The 911 centers do an amazing job while working in their element of servicing urban and city populations. But they are disconnected from remote sites in terms of communication and resources.

TEAAM provides a high level of care direct from remote site to hospital, providing the direct quick response care that should be the minimum standard for our crews at remote work sites. TEAAM's crew and equipment at an incident can shrink the precious time between a serious injury occurring and the patient receiving stabilizing treatment. It can then shorten transportation time by flying directly to the closest trauma centre. These potentially life and limb-saving features are critical given the remote and difficult settings where our sector works and injuries can occur. This does not replace the excellent services of BC Ambulance. It provides an extension of emergency treatment and rescue well beyond the capacity and timely reach of our public ambulance service. It is our position that the advanced technical and medical service ability of the TEAAM

model combined with our public health care system should be the standard of care for forestry workplaces in BC.

We believe WorkSafeBC has both a vested interest and a role to play in helping the forest and other resource sectors reach the goal of having a comprehensive HEMS service available province-wide. Reducing fatalities and decreasing traumatic impacts of serious injuries presents both a moral and business case for WorkSafeBC.

In order to advance towards that, we are asking the following:

- That WorkSafeBC undertake a business case analysis for operating a HEMS model for remote workers in British Columbia. This would compare available data, risks, costs and benefits involved in funding a provincial HEMS. We would expect that work would include examining comparable schemes such as the Shock Trauma Air Rescue Services (STARS) in Alberta as well as airborne emergency response operations in jurisdictions in Europe and the United States.
- That WorkSafeBC fund TEAAM's current operations on an interim pilot basis as a way of proving the HEMS concept for British Columbia, gathering operational data on costs and making any recommendations to improve effectiveness. This should take place as soon as practicable to preserve TEAAM should its private patronage scheme fail to fully support its operations. We need to emphasize that time is of the essence on this second request. TEAAM remains a reliable service. But we believe that without timely support it may not be able to operate over the long term. Acting with some urgency will prevent this possibility and its consequences.

We think that TEAAM's success so far is proof of concept already. It certainly is for those workers who have benefitted from their service. At the same time, more employers and their crews are seeing the benefits of HEMS as TEAAM gets better known across the sector. This is contributing to justified rising expectations around improving the standard of emergency response for workers on remote and difficult sites across the province. We believe that our organizations, WorkSafeBC and the BC Forest Safety Council have an opportunity to work collectively to improve worker safety outcomes in BC. We look forward to working together to make that happen and to meeting soon to discuss this further. We appreciate your time and interest in this.



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