

PROFILE

Project Heavy Duty

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When a successful youth training program in Vanderhoof caught the attention of a school board trustee from the Peace River North school district, it didn't take long to set the wheels in motion. School District #60 hired Richard Koop as a career programs coordinator and one year later in the spring of 2002, he had organized their first Project Heavy Duty course. "The majority of job opportunities in our area are with oil and forestry companies", explains Koop. "Industry was telling us they needed to replace retiring workers, but couldn't hire young people without some sort of pre-job exposure and training."

The five-day course offers forty grade eleven and twelve students an opportunity to experience one-on-one heavy equipment training and a rigorous safety orientation. "Safety is top priority for Project Heavy Duty", says Koop, noting that the program has been accident free since its start up. The twenty-acre training site is set up to imitate both an oil patch and forestry environment, with participants working from 6:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. rotating through six heavy equipment stations.

Ron Samborski, School Superintendent for School District #60, notes the tremendous support of local industry who provide over \$250,000 of in-kind contributions. "They provide supply fuel, food, operator time, and approximately twenty-two million dollars worth of machinery and equipment," says Samborski. He goes on to say that community feedback has been remarkable, and that the success of Project Heavy Duty can be measured by the number of students hired directly out of the program into heavy industry jobs: thirty percent in year one, and more than fifty percent in year two. Project Heavy Duty looks like a win-win scenario for students, employers and the community.

