

# Forest worker's injury underscores need for eye protection

By Susan Main

**I**nterfor machine operator Owen Peterson suffered a serious and prolonged eye injury from a small, minor work task. His story (see "Just another day?") has prompted others to pay more attention to the urgent need for eye protection.

Dave Mullett, environment and safety coordinator for the Port Hardy Operations Group at Interfor, says Peterson's story has been related extensively throughout the company. "Owen's story shows how easily a tragedy can happen," says Mullett. "Ironically, eye protection became a company-wide focus before we knew Owen's injury was serious." Interfor recognizes that it must promote and enforce the use of eye protection for *all* maintenance and work activities.

WCB safety officer Chris Warburton was so moved by Owen's appeal that he tells the story while visiting other worksites. Warburton worked in forestry for 17 years and understands the importance of using eye protection in the bush. While walking through the trees or bending down to hook up a choker, workers are at risk from swinging branches, flying sawdust, and pieces of metal.

Warburton urges workers to protect themselves with safety glasses, sideshields, or face guards – depending on the specific conditions. He cites Section 8.14 of the Regulation: "A worker must wear properly fitting safety eyewear appropriate to the conditions of the workplace if handling or exposed to materials which are likely to injure or irritate the eyes."

Supervisors play an essential role in ensuring that workers use appropriate eye protection. "Supervisors are the key. If they model good behaviour by using personal protective equipment, including eyewear, then everybody catches on," says Warburton. He advises them to do daily informal inspections to make sure workers are wearing eye protection.

## **JUST ANOTHER DAY?**

**March 29, 2001**

At 8:45 that morning I was putting together a feed chain on a drill when I felt something hit my left eye, not hard – probably a piece of dirt. I realized something was wrong when black lines crossed my vision. When I looked in the mirror I saw blood running out of my eye.

I didn't even think about safety glasses. It was a small work task that wouldn't take long. Had I been wearing safety glasses, at 5:30 p.m. the Port McNeil doctor would not be showing me x-rays of my eye, with a piece of metal in the back of it. I underwent surgery in Comox later that night.

The next day an infection sets in. It had to be dealt with right away or I'd lose the eye. So the doctor freezes my eye, inserts a needle, drains some fluid, and injects antibiotics. Because of the infection the freezing doesn't take completely. When he inserts the needle into my eye, the pain is so severe I faint. I come to four hours later.

Then check ups every day. On Day 6 there is still inflammation. A Vancouver specialist insists the infection must be taken out now. So it's a rush to the ferry, then to the Vancouver General Hospital, where I endure another long surgery.

They took the infection out in small sheets, being careful not to tear the retina. Now, I must watch for a change in vision, which indicates the retina has come loose and a cataract has started.

The morning after the operation I can see some colour and shape, light coming through the window and a shadow outline

*Continued on page 9*



young, inexperienced workers. Veterans trained to different standards of safety, depending on the jobsite, will also benefit from the course. The CSTS provides standardized, uniformly delivered education that is specifically tailored to the B.C. market.”

Divided into 12 modular lessons, the CSTS covers subjects such as personal protective equipment, common workplace hazards, and emergency response. Each lesson uses video clips and narrative to teach workers, and allows them to test their knowledge through interactive questions and scenarios. At the end of each lesson workers must complete a test, and only after they score 100 percent are they able to move on. The CSTS tracks test results and stores a record in a central database.

### **BCIT provides certification**

When a worker successfully completes the training, a record is sent to BCIT, and a certification card is issued to the worker. The card is valid for three years.

BCIT offers the training at its Burnaby campus. Other providers can also deliver the CSTS, as long as they have been accredited in advance. These providers include colleges, unions, labour associations, third-party trainers, and even employers who wish to train their employees in-house on their own computers.

Brian Finnie, part-time studies coordinator at BCIT, expects the CSTS will soon be widely available at several locations, including most college campuses throughout the province. “This means that most workers won’t have to travel far to get the training, and will save time and money. And because there are no formal classrooms or deadlines, workers can complete the course at their own pace and convenience.”

### **BCIT offers additional training options**

In addition to the CSTS, BCIT has developed other options for delivering health and safety training to workers throughout the province.

BCIT offers a host of distance education courses – although not specific to the construction industry – on subjects such as disability management, fire protection, and risk management. Also, if an organization has 12 or more interested participants, BCIT can deliver customized training courses on-site, or in central locations.

Last March BCIT began offering an Internet-based training course for joint occupational health and safety committees; and by year-end the Occupational Health and Safety department plans to introduce two online courses, with more to follow.

For more information about BCIT’s Occupational Health and Safety courses, visit its web site at [www.health.bcit.ca/ochs/](http://www.health.bcit.ca/ochs/).

To find the nearest CSTS provider, or for more information about the course, contact Paula Rossetti, program assistant in construction trades at BCIT, at 604 412-7564, fax 604 439-0426, or e-mail [paula\\_rossetti@bcit.ca](mailto:paula_rossetti@bcit.ca).

## **Resources**

### **Construction safety resources**

Resources for workers and employers in the construction sector can be obtained at no charge from WCB Publications and Videos at 604 276-3068 (toll-free in B.C. 1 800 661-2112, local 3068), fax 604 279-7406, or e-mail [pubvid@wcb.bc.ca](mailto:pubvid@wcb.bc.ca).

Relevant materials include:

- *Constructive Ideas* (booklet containing ideas for reducing soft tissue injuries in the construction industry)
- *Chainsaw Safety* (pamphlet)
- *An Introduction to Personal Fall Protection Equipment* (booklet)
- *Safe Work Practices for House Construction* (manual)
- *Working Safely Around Electricity* (booklet)

### *Continued from page 5* **JUST ANOTHER DAY?**

of my wife. This is more than the doctor figured would happen. The next morning nothing – I can’t see a thing! So it’s off to Vancouver General again; there is either bleeding in the eye or the retina has come loose.

We arrive at the hospital late afternoon on Good Friday. An ultrasound shows the retina has detached, and more infection. I undergo an all-night surgery. This time they reattach the retina, completely drain and clean the the eye, and refill with silicon oil. Already a cataract has started so they also remove the lens.

The last check up showed there is a membrane growing where the cataract was, which will have to be removed when they replace the lens. Now I must wait three to six months to see if scar tissue will

form. If all goes well they’ll take out the oil and replace the lens. Then hope like heck my sight returns, which may take a year or more.

On top of this are the side effects of all the drugs and pills, and the emotional pain – not only for me but also for my family. And it’s not over yet.

If you still feel this can’t happen to you, just close one eye for a few months and see if this is what you want! Rest assured, safety glasses for me now are a *must*, no matter how small a job at work or home. I never want to go through this again, or lose what little I have left of my eyesight.

**PLEASE PROTECT YOUR EYES!**

– Owen Peterson

