

# Every Minute Counts

Emergency Response Planning in Forestry



Video Discussion Guide

**WORK SAFE BC**



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# Introduction

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## About emergency response planning

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Emergency response planning means having the right information, training, and equipment to respond effectively when an injury or other catastrophic event occurs. While emergency response planning typically involves a medical situation, it's important to note that it goes beyond first aid.

Emergency response planning can be extremely challenging for forestry operations because of the range of work activities involved. Plus, since the work is performed entirely outdoors in temporary locations, standard “factory-floor” policies and procedures won't work. Each forestry operation has unique risks that need to be taken into consideration, such as access issues and ever-changing weather conditions. An inadequate emergency response plan (ERP) can result in a delayed evacuation, which can

lead to poor outcomes for the injured worker, exacerbate an injury, or expose first responders or other workers to additional danger.

Creating an effective ERP that's based on a good, site-specific risk assessment is one of the most important things employers can do to help their workers if things go wrong. Developing a good plan involves including the right people, such as those who will actually be on site, and taking the time to learn important local details, such as access routes, who else is working in the area, and what support services are available to respond.

It's also essential to consider other emergencies that would require evacuation. This includes environmental disasters, such as fires and landslides. In these cases, it's critical that workers are moved to safety quickly or there may be further injury or loss.

The logistics of forestry work are always changing, so it's extremely important to be able to adapt the plan accordingly. Assess your current situation and consider what things could go wrong, and then plan how your crew should respond. A plan may need to be revisited and adjusted as often as every day, depending on how often factors change for your operation. These factors may include the location, work specs, weather, crew, and the equipment being used.

Even though an ERP can't account for every possibility, thorough planning and practice will go a long way in ensuring workers know how to respond to incidents and receive help as quickly as possible. Forestry firms and crews are already experts at adapting operationally and dealing with logistical challenges — you just need to apply those skills to emergency planning as well. Even if your firm already invests a lot of effort and time into emergency planning, it's worth reassessing on a continual basis to make sure the plan meets your ever-changing needs and situation. Remember: you can always be better prepared.



## About the video



This fictional video highlights a complex challenge all workers in remote areas face: what to do in an emergency situation and how to ensure you receive outside assistance as quickly as possible. This video intentionally strays from the traditional safety video format where the audience is informed of a problem and shown how to do things the right way.

The story challenges the assumption that responding to emergencies is straightforward and someone will always be available to help.

It takes place on a cut block where an equipment operator is working, but the principles and challenges are applicable to all types of forestry operations. The story demonstrates how a situation can easily get worse and how a number of small factors can add up to a success or failure.

This video is intended for anyone involved in planning or conducting operations in the woods, including forestry employers and contractors, supervisors, workers, and licensees and/or owners.

## About this discussion guide

This discussion guide provides background information for viewing the video and suggestions for facilitating discussion before and after viewing. Some of the questions include a list of possible answers, while others are left open-ended. There is no one correct answer to any of these questions; they are intended only to promote discussion and encourage viewers to reflect on how they would respond in a similar situation.

A section debunking common myths about ERPs has also been included at the end of this guide to promote further discussion and reflection.





# Pre-viewing questions and discussion points

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Initiate a discussion on emergency response planning and the elements of an effective ERP. Follow up with why a thorough ERP is so important, and how it may vary depending on the environment (e.g., in a remote forestry setting versus a more traditional work environment). You can ask some of the following questions to generate discussion:

- What are some of the key elements of an ERP?
- What types of incidents might you need to respond to?
- What are the challenges involved?
- Does your firm's ERP effectively address those challenges?
- Have you or your firm ever had to put an ERP into action? What happened, and what was the outcome? What effect would practising your plan have had — or did have — on the outcome?
- Is there anything you would change or like to see as part of your firm's ERP?

Introduce the video and ask viewers to pay attention to where things could have been dealt with better, as well as what could have gone worse. Encourage viewers to reflect on their own ability to respond if they were placed in a similar situation.

Here are some questions for the viewers to keep in mind while watching the video:

- What went well?
- What could they have improved on? What might the workers have done differently if they had practised their plan?
- What circumstances made the situation challenging? What could have made it even more challenging?
- Who do you think bore the primary responsibility for responding to the emergency?
- What steps could be taken to improve a response like this in the future?

# Post-viewing questions and discussion points

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After the video, engage viewers in discussion. Facilitate the discussion by revisiting the questions that were asked before the video started.

## **What were some safety messages of this video?**

- All workers need to know what to do in an emergency. Often, worksites rely on the individual in charge to make all the decisions; but in this video, it's the supervisor that gets hurt. In the bush, supervisors or those in charge are often offsite or doing different work, and aren't always immediately available to direct others.
- Conditions change all the time in forestry: weather, which workers are on site, and where you are working are just a few examples. Not being on top of these details could lead to delayed response and confusion.
- It's critical that all workers know their physical locations at all times and can communicate that to emergency responders. Also, keep in mind that it's not easy to describe where you are in a way that's meaningful to those not in the industry. Directions for air versus ground (and possibly marine) support will be different.
- The best way to prepare for what might happen and learn where your vulnerabilities are in an emergency is to practise your plan.
- Small crews may mean less risk due to lower exposure levels, but when something does happen it's more difficult to respond. Carrying someone even a short distance on a hillside becomes incredibly challenging — and even impossible at times — when you have a small crew.
- Everyone is a helper in an emergency situation — it's not just the first aider's responsibility. The first aider needs to be able to focus on treatment and not the evacuation coordination details, which should be someone else's role. This reinforces how important it is that everyone in the crew understands the ERP and what role they play.

## **What challenges did the workers in the video encounter in the emergency situation?**

- Workers weren't clear on their physical locations, which delayed the response time. (Refer to earlier point about the importance of all workers knowing their physical locations at all times.)
- The helicopter wasn't able to help them. Don't rely solely on a helicopter to airlift the injured person out as there may not be one available or it may not be able to get to you.
- There were delays in reaching the ambulance crew, which resulted in an additional delay to get to the ETV (emergency transport vehicle).
- It was difficult to carry the worker down the block with only four people.
- The supervisor from the other site was not well-trained on how to use the satellite phone.

## **What are some examples of what the group did well?**

- The first aider was available, competent, and knew how to find the worker. He managed the scene well, but clearly had to take charge with other well-meaning colleagues.
- First aid equipment (stretcher kit) was in good shape and ready to go. The ETV was reliable and available.
- There were helpers available and called to the scene right away. It was a struggle, but they managed to get the worker off the block.
- The appropriate phone numbers were available, along with equipment to call (satellite phone with charged battery) and various handheld radios.
- They were able to contact coworkers, and they knew who the other supervisor was.
- They had someone available to rendezvous with the ambulance.

## **How could a crew in a similar situation enable a smoother response?**

- Make sure everyone has a basic level of understanding about emergency procedures. In the video, it was the supervisor that got hurt; so relying only on him to arrange help would be a problem.
- The first aider should be with the radio at all times.

- Have all crew members carry block locations and who is working where. (The information was nearby, which worked out in this situation, but it could have easily been too far away, such as in a vehicle.)
- Ideally, have seven people to carry the stretcher: six people on and one rotating out for a break and scouting the best route to get down. Use a sled-style stretcher that can be dragged down the hill.
- Train helpers on how to support the first aider.
- Determine in advance who drives which vehicles and who moves unattended vehicles to another location.
- Maintain a tidy truck to make it easier to find the ERP information when it's needed.
- Establish ground support directions (i.e., how to direct an ambulance to your site). In the video, the second supervisor could have been able to help on the scene if he didn't need to help the ambulance.
- Practise using a satellite phone, and remember that 911 usually won't work in the bush. Know in advance who to call and what to say.
- Have pre-determined muster/rendezvous points, and consider helicopter and road transfer points.
- To the best of your ability, stay calm and focused. In the video, the supervisor was driving too fast and could have gone off the road. In the chaos of an emergency, a secondary incident can happen that makes the first incident even more traumatic.
- In tragic situations, crew members are often left at the worksite wondering how the person is doing, feeling stressed, and even guilty. Have a plan to place someone in charge, deal with critical equipment and vehicles, and, if appropriate, get people back to a safe place, such as town or camp.

# Myth versus reality in an ERP

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**Myth #1: Emergencies only result from catastrophic events.**

## **Reality**

The video demonstrates how emergency situations can occur from doing everyday tasks. No one gets hit by swinging machinery or chainsaws or attacked by a bear (all of which are possible in this high-risk industry); someone simply slips and falls, which can happen many times on any given day. As the video shows, responding to a relatively common incident is already very challenging—imagine how stressful a more serious incident would be.

**Myth #2: Only workers performing high-risk activities, such as manual falling, need to worry about an ERP.**

## **Reality**

This video is intended to speak to all forestry workers, not highlight any one sector in particular. Incidents like the one shown in the video can happen to anyone who works in difficult terrain, which applies to majority of the workers in this business. While it's true that higher-risk activities like falling may have higher consequences in terms of injury severity, emergency situations can also occur during low-risk activities, such as traversing or tree planting. Regardless of the activity, there is a high level of risk for everyone who works in the woods because of the remote, outdoor nature of the industry.

### **Myth #3: An ERP is the same as first aid.**

#### **Reality**

While an ERP and first aid are connected, it's important to note that they are separate processes and need to be planned for separately. An ERP considers what you need to do after the injury, beyond treatment, such as getting the person evacuated and to appropriate care. A simple injury can potentially become catastrophic if the worker experiences onset shock or hypothermia — very real risks with delayed response. You cannot expect a first aider to automatically handle or direct this entire process.

Other non-first aid related emergencies such as a fire, earthquake, or landslide, must also be considered and planned for. The process for responding to these situations, which may involve aspects such as multiple people and environmental factors, will be significantly different than one that relies only on a first aider.

### **Myth #4: So many things change in our worksite that there is no point in practising.**

#### **Reality**

Most people in this business are already aware of the risks associated with emergencies, but may not truly understand how complicated it can be to get help and how long it might take. When standard emergency response procedures aren't possible, it's easy to just not think about it and hope for the best. While you can't practise for every possible scenario, responding to a hypothetical incident still offers valuable, transferable learning. Firms who regularly perform practise drills agree that they are the most effective way to learn and improve response.

Also, an effective ERP requires planning and practice from all parties — not just the supervisor or the first aider. It requires



buy-in, resources, and training from company owners, as well as support and oversight by licensees and prime contractors. It's too late to save your learning for when an emergency actually happens.



**Myth #5: I only have a few people in my crew so I don't need an ERP.**

### **Reality**

It's true that if you have a smaller crew, there are fewer chances an emergency or injury may occur. However, if something does happen, a smaller crew also means there are fewer people to help and the level of first aid training may not be ideal. Even though first aid tables may indicate a certain level of first aid equipment based on your crew size, a higher level may actually be required in order to respond effectively in your situation.

**Myth #6: I'll just call 911 and an ambulance will come to our location.**

**Reality**

Calling 911 is not a plan and, in fact, in many situations you may not even have service on your satellite phone. Again, this is an area that needs to be practised; make sure you know what coverage you get with your phone, what the best type of communication equipment is for your situation. Ensure everyone knows how to place emergency calls.

# WorkSafeBC publications and videos

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Many publications and videos are available for download on the WorkSafeBC website. The Occupational Health and Safety Regulation and associated policies and guidelines, as well as the *Workers Compensation Act*, are also available on [worksafebc.com](http://worksafebc.com).

Some publications and videos are available for purchase in print:

Phone: 604.232.9704  
Toll-free phone: 1.866.319.9704  
Fax: 604.232.9703  
Toll-free fax: 1.888.232.9714  
Online ordering: [worksafebcstore.com](http://worksafebcstore.com)

# WorkSafeBC prevention information line

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The WorkSafeBC prevention information line can answer your questions about workplace health and safety, worker and employer responsibilities, and can help you report a workplace accident or incident. The prevention information line accepts anonymous calls.

Phone 604.276.3100 in the Lower Mainland, or call 1.888.621.7233 (621.SAFE) toll-free in British Columbia.

To report after-hours and weekend accidents and emergencies, call 604.723.7711 in the Lower Mainland, or call 1.866.922.4356 (WCB.HELP) toll-free in British Columbia.



