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Thematic session I: Occupational Health and Safety of Forest Workers

Background

Forestry work is generally characterized by a combination of natural risks and risks directly related to forestry operations. The natural risks are associated with steep and broken terrain, dense crops and adverse working conditions, including extremes of climate - both hot and cold. The negative effects of these natural features can be increased by the inadequacy or absence of factors such as proper work-site facilities, appropriate equipment and protective clothing.

Industrial forestry work may be roughly divided into three categories: silviculture, harvesting and processing. If accidents are broadly grouped along these lines, harvesting-related accidents account for approximately up to 70 percent of total accidents (ILO). Within forest harvesting, felling and cross-cutting are the jobs most prone to accidents, particularly the most serious and fatal ones.

Forestry accidents take a heavy toll but serious and insidious health problems are also created by the constant exposure of forestry workers to excessive physical stress such as whole body and hand-arm vibration, acoustic and infrasonic noise, biohazards and musculoskeletal loads which may cause a variety of work related or occupational diseases (e.g., noise induced hearing loss, hand-arm vibration syndrome, infectious and parasitic diseases, allergic diseases, photo dermatoses, toxic reactions and spine pain syndrome and peripheral nervous system diseases).

Occupational accidents and health impairments are a source of human suffering and, as such, affect the expectations that every man and woman has regarding personal physical and psychological health and integrity. Safety at work is not only an ethical imperative, but it also makes economic sense. In addition to the substantial direct costs associated with accidents, such as compensation, medical treatment and wages, there are indirect costs which may be several times higher.

Apart from significant social and economic impacts, the consequences of unsafe and inappropriately executed forest operations can cause damage to forest ecological systems. Therefore, occupational health and safety of forest workers is also a prerequisite for environmentally sound management and utilization of forest resources.

For that reason, governments, enterprises, employers and worker's organizations are willing to tackle the challenges related to the occupational health and safety of forest workers. This session will aim to identify the examples of existing and potential measures which could support the development of green jobs, enhance safe work organization and provide adequate training for forest workers.



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Presentations

- How the health and safety of forest workers is addressed in the international FSC certification scheme, John Hontelez, FSC
- How the health and safety of forest workers is reflected in the PEFC certification scheme at the national level, PEFC
- Health and safety in exceptional situations – forest fire fighters, Johann G. Goldammer, Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC)

Questions for the workshop session:

1. What are the driving forces and implications related to the occupations health and safety of forest workers
2. What are the guiding principles assuring health and safety in forest work? Which of them can be replicated?
3. What are the examples of existing policies (international and national) that improved the safety and health conditions of forest workers?
4. What other policy and non-policy tools could improve the current situation?
5. What stakeholders should be engaged in the development of new measures?
6. What improvements should be made in the education curricula and professional training to better protect forest workers from occupational accidents and diseases?
7. How the concept of green jobs could support communication about the issues relevant to the occupational health and safety of forestry workers?

The session will be moderated by: