

Logger Safety Initiative Background

The Logging Safety Initiative (LSI) began in 2012 when industry leaders from the Washington Contract Logger Association (WCLA), the Washington Forest Protection Association (WFPA), and Public Lands Commissioner Peter Goldmark began meeting with L&I to discuss the workers' compensation rates, trends and injury statistics for non-mechanized or manual logging operations (5001).

In recent years, risk class 5001 has experienced catastrophic and costly claims, but fewer hours have been reported by employers – a situation that has more than doubled the base rate over the past five years. Trends indicate the rates are likely to increase further in the future, due to the number of severe injuries in the past few years. During initial meetings, all parties agreed that too many injuries were occurring and that logging companies were facing unaffordable workers' compensation premium rates. Action to improve logging safety is an urgent need.

From the beginning, a key focus has been on finding ways to improve the safety performance of the industry so that both the frequency and severity of injuries could be reduced. L&I agreed to work with industry representatives to organize a Logger Safety Taskforce that would develop a Washington State Logger Safety Initiative.

In January 2013, a letter confirming their commitment to providing the time and resources to build a successful safety program was finalized and signed by all of the parties. Governor Jay Inslee signed the commitment letter on May 21, 2013.

The Logger Safety Taskforce was initiated in March 2013, and included both a policy and technical committee. In January 2015, a formal Taskforce was established and meets on a quarterly basis. Other members include logging company representatives, WCLA, forest landowners, WFPA, L&I, and the Washington State Department of Natural Resources.

The Logger Safety Initiative was supported by the passage of Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill (ESSB 5744) by the Washington State Legislature in April 2013. It was signed by Governor Inslee in May. This legislation acknowledges the need for the Logger Safety Taskforce's work, recognizing that workers in manual logging (especially younger workers new to the industry) have more frequent and more severe injuries than in other industries.