

**Training for
Log Haul Trucking

Opportunity Report**

Prepared for the
Northern Labour Market Information Clearinghouse

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Introduction

Logging trucks are a common sight on the roads of northern Alberta. Despite the available courses and the need for training identified by some in the forestry industry, most of the log haul truckers on the road today learned their craft on the job. With several new mills and expansions planned in the forest industry the need for trained log haul truckers is likely to increase over the next few years. This report examines the actual demand for log haul training and the difference between the perceived need and the demand.

Methodology

The bulk of the information for this report comes from people working in the field of log hauling. First, surveys were faxed to 41 log haul contractors listed in the [Alberta Forestry Directory](#); of whom ten responded. Respondents ranged from single owner-operators to larger companies employing up to 68 drivers. Second, log haul coordinators from five northern Alberta forestry companies were interviewed about their views on training needs for log haul truckers.

Training Available

Keyano College and AVC - Lesser Slave Lake both offer Log Haul Trucking certificate programs that take about four weeks to complete.

The Alberta Forest Products Association (AFPA) has developed a short “Log Haul Professional” course to help establish basic standards for all log haul drivers. This course can be taught in-house by AFPA members or by Cameron Driver Education to non-members. Cameron is interested in working with post-secondary institutions in the delivery of this course.

General truck driving and safety training is available from dozens of colleges and private training firms.

Employment Demand

It is difficult to estimate the number of log haul drivers in northern Alberta but the figure is certainly in the thousands during the winter logging season. Qualified drivers are in high demand. Contractors and major forestry companies state that it is often difficult to find the drivers that they need; some attribute this to the high level of activity in the energy sector. Contractors surveyed expect their employment levels to remain steady (60%) or increase (40%) in the next three years.

Drivers generally work for about 4.5 months per year on log haul. Most spend the rest of the year working at jobs ranging from gravel hauling to agriculture.

Most contractors claim low to moderate rates of turnover among their drivers. One log haul coordinator estimated that 20% of the drivers are new each year.

Training demand

The vast majority of log haul drivers on the road today learn their craft on the job and their employers seem to favour this. When hiring drivers, contractors place a greater value on experience than on formal training. Most of them learned on the job themselves and see little value in college courses. The low rate of return of our survey suggests that training is not a major issue for many log haul contractors. One contact reported that some graduates of log haul training programs deliberately hide their training from employers for fear of a negative reaction. While this may be an overstatement, new drivers certainly do not see formal training as a prerequisite for employment.

Major forestry companies tend to see a greater need for training than do contractors. Most of the companies contacted would like to see drivers have more training than they do, especially for the estimated 20% of drivers who are new. One log haul coordinator complained that contractors often do not invest the necessary time and money in the training of new drivers. Alberta Pacific's pulp mill near Boyle used to insist that their contractors hire trained drivers but the shortage of drivers in the last couple of years has forced them to abandon that policy.

By contrast, Tolko Industries has been able to enforce a training standard with the two main contractors hauling logs to their High Prairie OSB mill. Their log haul drivers must have training equal to a certificate from Keyano College or AVC - Lesser Slave Lake. Being a relatively new mill, Tolko is able to set such standards without having to change any long-standing policies.

Other mills, such as Daishowa-Marubeni in Peace River, look to improve the general standard of their log haul drivers by implementing the AFPA Log Haul Professional program for their main contractors.

Even with their general preference for on-the-job training, many contractors would like to see their drivers receive some training, including: safety, defensive driving, communications, off-highway/extreme conditions driving and general professionalism.

Comments

As one contact pointed out, the colleges have not sold the contractors on the merits of their training programs for log haul truckers. In the case of oil field truckers, the fact that the major oil companies have endorsed the General Oilfield Driver Improvement (GODI) course has not resulted in a significant increase in that course's popularity. Until the contractors themselves see the value of training, drivers will not see a need to take a college program.

The Alberta Logging Association is working with Grande Prairie Regional College to establish an apprentice-type program for a number of forestry workers including log haul drivers.

Some contacts have mentioned that it may be more valuable to train drivers who already have some experience than to concentrate on completely new, inexperienced students.

Many contacts pointed out that most drivers are unwilling and/or unable to spend both the time and money to take a college certificate training program, particularly if it will not advance their careers.

Implications for Clearinghouse Partners

Colleges will have to work with contractors to develop programs that the contractors will value. Without greater acceptance from employers, the majority of log haul truckers will see little reason to take a college course.

Opportunities may exist to present the AFPA's Log Haul Professional program which can be brokered with Cameron Driver Education of Edmonton (1-800-661-7031). This may help colleges to develop relationships within the industry.

Sources

Independent Directories, Alberta Forestry Directory, 1996/97, Burnaby, 1996.

Clearinghouse report, "Trucking in the Oil and Gas Industry", October, 1996.

Contacts

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