

Treeplanter killed in crash

Written by GORDON HOEKSTRA

Citizen staff

Friday, 16 May 2008

A 25-year-old Montreal woman was killed Thursday evening when she was ejected from a crew-cab pickup carrying a tree-planting crew that rolled on a logging road south of Vanderhoof.

Christine Benoit-Belisle was transported to St. John's Hospital in Vanderhoof, but succumbed to her injuries, Vanderhoof RCMP said Friday. The police said Benoit-Belisle was not wearing a seatbelt. The other four occupants of the crew-cab suffered minor injuries. Vanderhoof RCMP, with the help of Prince George RCMP, and the coroner's office continue to investigate the crash at the 83.5-kilometre mark of the Kluskus Forest Service Road. WorkSafe B.C. was also on the scene.

"This is not the call you want to receive," said John Betts, executive director of the Western Silviculture Contractors Association. "It's a big main thoroughfare, the vehicle hit some washboards (a bumpy sections) or something, probably lost control, and a seatbelt not done up -- that's all I know about it," said Betts, who had talked with those familiar with the crash.

The two-lane Kluskus road is considered one of the better resource roads in the region.

Betts said he believed the crew was reporting back from a day off, and that the woman, who had just been hired, was reporting to work with the crew. While there have been relatively few fatalities involving silviculture crews in B.C.'s Northern Interior in the past two decades, Betts said that transportation is the area where the silviculture sector is most exposed to possibly fatal hazards.

MaryAnne Arcand, who heads up the TruckSafe program for the B.C. Forest Safety Council, said this death hits hard, particularly as it is the third forestry-related death this week in the province.

A tree faller and a driller-blaster workman on a road building crew were both killed on Vancouver Island in the past week in separate incidents, she said.

The three deaths raise the total in the province to eight this year, including three now in northern B.C.

A log truck driver was killed in January on a resource road north of Fort St. James, and another log truck driver was killed in March on a highway north of Fort St. John.

Log truckers lead the death toll in northern B.C., where more than 30 drivers have been killed on backroads and highways since 1995.

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written by [MustBMe](#) , May 19, 2008 (08:36:07 AM)

I am sure speed was the main factor. I have almost been run off the road on more than one occasion by treeplanters coming and going to work. Most of these people are from Eastern Canada and have never even driven on a washboard gravel road, but yet they feel they have the skill and experience to drive as fast as people who do it everyday. You dont roll vehicles if driving with due care and attention.

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written by [JoG](#) , May 19, 2008 (11:22:32 PM)

I agree that excessive speed for the road condition was likely the key factor. The seatbelt is merely the last line of defense in a system with multiple failsafes.

1. the road should have been better maintained so that there would be no washboards.
2. the airbag should have deployed (maybe it did, but it says nothing about it) These are typically very new vehicles.
3. the door should have been automatically locked and should not have popped open (if that is how she was "ejected").
4. If she was trained in driving safely, which most of the drivers are, she should have been wearing a seatbelt and made sure everyone else was.
5. the final line of defense is the seatbelt.

It appears that a multiple number of safety measures or systems did not work properly, failure to not have a seatbelt on, or even the failure of the seatbelt was the last line of defense.

As far as being an eastern driver, Quebec and Ontario are inundated with gravel roads for resource access as well as remote cottage and fishing/hunting access, not much different than here.

Given the age, and the fact she was driving, is also an indicator that she was not new to such roads. I doubt that junior and new employees would typically be driving with a crew in the truck.

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written by [MustBMe](#) , May 20, 2008 (05:27:00 AM)

Where does it say she was the driver? I doubt a crewcab pickup has airbags in the back. Most tree planters I have met are college/univ students from the bigger cities and most dont have experience with bush roads being they grew up in large cities. If she was just hired and was going out on her first job, I doubt very much she was the

actual driver.

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written by [ruskavitch](#) , May 25, 2008 (10:39:36 AM)

There's no way the person who died was the driver. If they were in fact coming back from a day off in Vanderhoof, i would not be surprised if the driver was hung over and tired from lack of sleep the night before. the companies around here are giving the keys to vehicles more and more often to individuals that are too young, careless and irresponsible to be driving on logging roads with passengers! there should be no reason to flip a truck on the kluskus around the 80km mark if you are driving the speed limit.

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