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### ANOTHER GOOD YEAR FOR LOGGING SAFETY IN THE SOUTH

*Surveys/Studies: safety*

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**INTRODUCTION:** Virginia Tech Forestry Operations researchers, in cooperation with key Workers' Compensation Insurance providers, have determined the annual Total Case Incident Rate (TCIR) for mechanized (feller-buncher/grapple skidder) timber harvesting operations in the South since 1996. (See FRA Technical Releases 00-R-2 and 01-R-12.) The TCIR is the U.S. Labor Department standard method for reporting the annual frequency of workplace injuries. It represents the average number of injuries incurred by 100 workers during a calendar year.

**FINDINGS:** Fig. 1 shows TCIRs for mechanized logging operations in the South for the period 1996 to 2000.

Following an impressive decline from 1996 (10.0) to 1999 (5.7), logging injury rates leveled off at 6.1 injuries per 100 workers in 2000. The current TCIR for mechanized logging operations in the South compares favorably with the U.S. Labor Department's 2000 "all

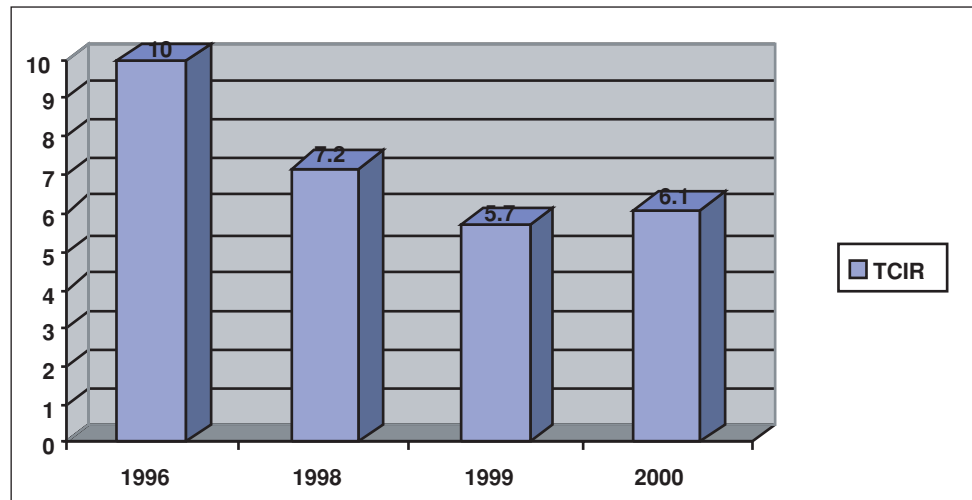


Fig. 1: TCIRs for mechanized logging operations in the South, 1996-2000.

industry average" TCIR of 5.8, and is significantly below the agency's published rate of 8.2 for the logging industry as a whole. It should be noted, however, that the Virginia Tech mechanized logging TCIR includes all injuries, while the Labor Department TCIR includes only "OSHA Reportable Injuries," or those that resulted in lost time and/or medical costs exceeding \$1000.

**DISCUSSION:** Although the 2000 TCIR for mechanized logging in the South increased slightly (7%) from the previous year, it remains far below the injury rates common to the industry only a few years ago. For example, the U.S. Labor Department TCIR for the logging industry in 1990 was 17.5, more than double the 2000 Labor Department rate, and nearly three times the current Virginia Tech rate established for mechanized operations in the South. In 2001, Virginia Tech researchers solicited the opinions of several loggers and forest industry professionals with expertise in logging safety about the reasons behind the impressive decline in injuries on mechanized operations. Their opinions, published in FRA Technical Release 01-R-12, are briefly summarized below:

- The continuing trend toward full mechanization has all but eliminated manual chain saw felling and delimiting on most jobs.
- Widespread logger participation in safety training programs through the Sustainable Forestry Initiative®, Workers' Compensation Insurance providers, state forestry associations, and other sources has resulted in greater overall safety awareness and improved safety practices.
- Logging equipment manufacturers have made operator safety a priority in the design and production of new machines.
- A high level of logger professionalism, with a corresponding commitment to safety and employee welfare, mandatory worker compliance with safety rules and regulations, and in some cases safety incentive reward programs, has become standard practice for many loggers seeking to maintain a competitive position in the marketplace.

Continued monitoring of the TCIR for mechanized logging operations in the South should indicate whether injury rates have indeed "leveled off" or if further reduction is achievable in this important segment of an industry which, until recently, was considered among the nation's most hazardous.

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