



## Lakeland Mills Ltd.

April 15, 2014

### **Lakeland Mills responds to Crown decision in sawmill explosion**

PRINCE GEORGE—Lakeland Mills Ltd. believes BC Crown Counsel conducted its charge assessment in the case of the explosion and fire at the Lakeland Mills sawmill in a fair and objective manner, and that its decision not to proceed with charges was the correct one.

“It is with great sadness that we reflect on the loss of Glenn Roche and Al Little and the impacts of this incident on the whole Lakeland family,” said Greg Stewart, president of Sinclair Group Forest Products, of which Lakeland Mills is a division. “Our employees and their families have paid a price for a problem that emerged with little warning, and that was faced by an entire industry.”

There were numerous factors involved in the explosions at not one, but two sawmills in the space of three months. The Crown’s Clear Statement points out that based on the information provided to the Crown by WorkSafe BC:

- The sawdust-related fire and explosion hazard was unknown to both WorkSafe BC and the sawmill industry in British Columbia prior to the incident at Lakeland.
- Evidence including WorkSafe BC’s own documents suggests that the risk of explosion was a “previously unrecognized hazard.”
- WorkSafe officers who inspected the mill in the months prior to the incident did not observe a dust violation and believed Lakeland was a “clean mill” compared to others.
- Although there was dust in Lakeland’s mill, the eyewitness evidence spoke to “relatively good, albeit imperfect” sawdust conditions on the evening of the incident.
- After the Babine incident, Lakeland made inquiries to attempt to learn about sawdust-related hazards and took steps to improve the condition of its mill.
- It was not until May 2012, after the incidents at both Babine and Lakeland, as WorkSafe BC began to understand what had occurred, that it began to publicly share its findings with workers, their families, industry and other stakeholders.

“We can’t change the past. But it’s important that we learn from it,” said Stewart. “When an unforeseen accident does happen as the result of a new risk, everyone involved – from the mill floor through the management office to regulators and government – has a responsibility to try to understand the causes and work together to try to eliminate the risk, and to prevent such a thing from occurring again. As president of the company, I take responsibility for ensuring that we address all known safety concerns and hazards going forward.”

Lakeland is incorporating advanced dust management equipment and technology in its new sawmill. The company will ensure the new combustible dust control standard developed by the forest industry’s CEO Task Force is implemented in the new mill, and that all employees have adequate training to understand and manage combustible dust. Lakeland’s goal is to create a safety culture that empowers each person to take action to address safety concerns for themselves and others.

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“We look forward to getting on with the construction of our new mill, to helping our employees get back to work, and to bringing greater certainty to their lives and the lives of their families and loved ones,” said Stewart.

Lakeland Mills is a family-owned company that has been providing employment for three generations of Prince George families since 1962.

The new sawmill will be integrated with the existing planer mill, which is still operational, and the energy system Lakeland operates in partnership with the City of Prince George.

The new sawmill will employ approximately 100 people and will open in Fall 2014.

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**Media inquiries:**

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