



## Lakeland Mills Ltd.

April 15, 2014

### **President Greg Stewart's statement on Crown decision in sawmill explosion**

I want to begin my comments today by acknowledging the families of Glenn Roche and Al Little, the employees who died in the explosion of April 23, 2012, as well as the injured workers on site that night, all Lakeland employees, their families and others impacted by this incident. Not a day goes by that I don't think about them. And my thoughts are especially with each and every one of them today, as we relive this terrible tragedy.

Providing a safe workplace for our employees has been a focus of this company since it was founded over 50 years ago by Ivan Andersen and my grandfather, Bob Stewart. The quality of our employees has allowed this company to be successful and they are one of the key reasons we are rebuilding. During our history, we have had multiple generations working for the company, giving the company a true sense of family. It is our employees who make our company great. On the night of April 23, 2012, we failed the expectations of our founders and, most importantly, our employees. For that, and for the impacts it has had on our employees, their families and our community, I will be eternally sorry.

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. In a situation such as this, there are so many factors that got us to the point at which these explosions could even happen that we believe it's impossible to pinpoint blame to any one element. The Crown has outlined how these factors were not well understood. Nor was the risk properly identified prior to these incidents. The magnitude of these explosions and their consequences were unprecedented in the BC forest industry.

That said, we believe all accidents should be preventable. What could have been done to prevent this accident is difficult to know, however. We did everything reasonable to ensure our mill was safe, given what we knew at the time. Worksafe BC inspectors described our mill as clean compared to others, and eyewitness evidence spoke to "relatively good, albeit imperfect" sawdust conditions on the evening of the incident.

Could we have done a better job of controlling dust? In hindsight, yes. Could we have done more to encourage our employees to speak up if they felt there were safety issues? In hindsight, perhaps.

As president of the company, I take responsibility for ensuring that we address all known safety concerns and hazards going forward. We can't change the past. But it's important that we learn from it.

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 – each and every one of us has an individual and collective 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. We owe it to our employees, our families and our communities.

We are a third generation, family-owned, community-based company. My grandfather and Ivan Andersen left a positive legacy for my generation and I plan to do the same. It begins and ends with safety. Therefore, I am making a commitment to our employees today: when you show up at work at the start of your shift, you have my word that we will do our part to ensure you return home to your family at the end of the day safe and sound.

As a company, we will learn from this incident and do everything reasonable to provide as safe a workplace as we can for our employees. It will start with a safety culture that empowers each person to take action to address safety concerns for themselves and others. We have worked on new systems to eliminate the risk from combustible dust and other safety hazards as we have been building our new sawmill. And going forward, we will coordinate our efforts with regulators, government and industry to ensure safety standards are as high as they can be, and that we strive to meet them each and every day.

As a company, we believe in this city and this province. Three generations of owners and employees have lived and worked here together for over half a century. And so we look forward to the day this fall when the new mill opens, we are able to put our employees back to work, and we can begin the next half century of contribution to this great community we call home.