

# Your body is a temple

**Toby Allan** (Say it with wood) believes that it's time for our sector to prioritise the physical health of its workers.

**F**orestry is a hard and potentially dangerous job, and after working in physical roles most of my adult life, the aches and pains are starting to increase as I get older. Along with workplace accidents, musculoskeletal injuries from repetitive hard graft was an accepted part of the job when I started out. Luckily we have begun to see sense as far as managing the risk of accidents goes. We all have a right to go home safely nowadays.

But we are still failing to deal with the potential threat of injuries caused through the way we work. Ironically this could be the strain of intense physical activity, such as hand-cutting timber, or potential heart problems from sitting operating machinery for long hours.

As an employer, I have a responsibility to ensure the workplace is safe, we provide training, Personal Protective Equipment, guard machinery and do our best to make the job easy. But I realise this hard physical activity or long hours of sedentary work could potentially cause future problems for the people I work with.

Say it with Wood's occupational health mission

Pretty much everything I've read online about either warming up before physical work or adding cardio exercise into the day of machine drivers has shown positive results. Have a look at the interesting resources recently put up on the CONFOR website to find out more. In principal it's easy- incorporate the appropriate exercise into the daily routine. Which is what my partner Aly and I are going to do. However, in this country, it's a change in culture we need. Explaining to young fit people that they need to exercise now, to avoid something that may or may not happen in several years' time goes against behavioural change theory. In short, we react strongly to things that are immediate, highly likely and with positive results. For example; it's easier to make someone get out of the way of a truck that's about to hit them than give up smoking. Other countries, such as Canada, have succeeded in changing this culture by demonstrating that there are financial benefits to thinking of your body as a working machine. A short cardio workout mid-shift should keep you focussed for the rest of the day driving a machine (immediate good thing), and contribute towards the 150 minutes cardio recommended by the NHS. Canadian tree planters engage in

physical improvement before and during a season because they earn more. Our bodies are our biggest asset, and in the same way we look after machines, we have to maintain our bodies to get the most from them.

Our plan

At Say it with Wood we've decided to incorporate exercise into the day and see what the results are.

In the yard and forest, our team of 'working athletes' will start the day with a short 5-10 min warm up and we'll take it from there. As back pain is the most likely injury, that is where we'll focus, after taking some advice the routine will look something like this:

- Jogging on the spot, star jumps or similar to get the blood pumping into the muscles.
- Neck - side to side, up down and rolls.
- Shoulders - butterflies forward and back.
- Trunk - Side stretches, forward bends and twists
- Legs - Knee to chest and heel to buttock stretch.
- Arms - Tendon and wrist extensions.

That's it. Short, sweet and achievable  
To be completely honest, the reaction

## Swiss forestry sector committed to getting workforce to work-out

The Swiss Ministry for Environment has started a pilot project to promote the physical health of forestry workers and apprentices. The initiative has resulted in a comprehensive set of guidance documents and videos with targeted exercises and fitness tests, mainly to be used in forestry colleges as part of the young people's programme to become future forestry workers.

In one of the forestry businesses participating in the programme, the workforce meets up every day for their morning exercises. 17-year old apprentice Florian (in picture) says that at the beginning, the proposition was a bit weird but now the morning

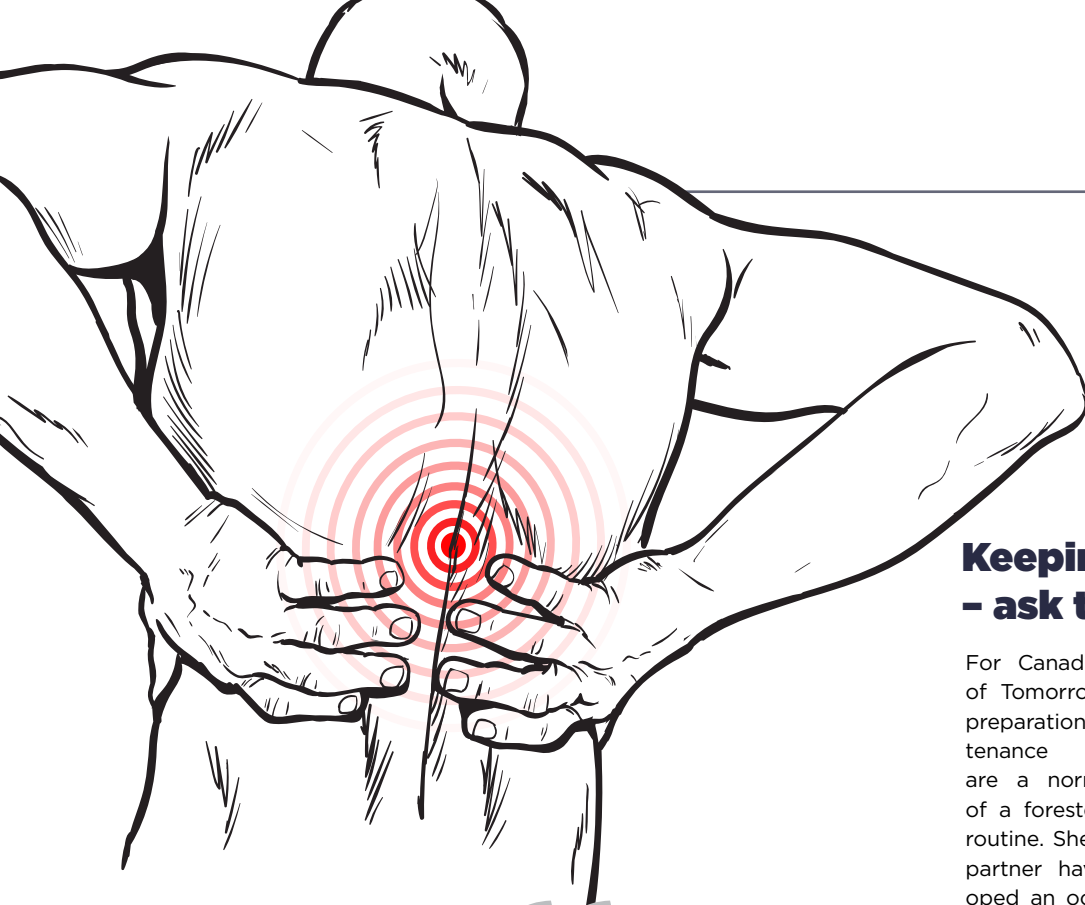
routine is an agreeable start for the working day to prepare for a hard day's work. He now knows which exercises benefit him most, in his case it's the "cat pose" (aka known as "happy cat")

The ministry for environment commissioned a private health provision company to develop and implement the programme for the forestry and related sectors.

The workers comment that stretching together in the morning also offers valuable socialising time. Once they are off in the forest, they are now more aware of their bodies needs and more consciously look after themselves.

This is so far a pilot programme and the next step is to encourage foresters to incorporate the programme into their working routine. And to hope for a lot of open-mindedness!





## Keeping planters upright - ask the Canadians

For Canadian Liz Boivin of Tomorrow's Forests, preparation and maintenance workouts are a normal part of a forester's daily routine. She and her partner have developed an occupational programme for their planting squads.



As back pain is the most likely injury, that is where we'll focus,



Poor posture from Ben and Connor

from the lads when we suggested this has ranged from disbelief to derision, which is why we're starting with a less is more attitude and monitoring results. If paying people to warm up for a few minutes each day means better productivity and less down time then that has to be an investment, right?

[www.sayitwithwood.co.uk](http://www.sayitwithwood.co.uk)

[@cleftchestnut](https://www.facebook.com/cleftchestnut)

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"I think promoting occupational health in our sector is something which everyone could benefit from. A lot of the older generation for example has been used to break their back at work and not really train in preparation of the work or stretch afterwards and this has caused life lasting injuries in some people. It is really important to open people's eyes to the danger of hard, repetitive work.

"In relation to tree planting, tendinitis is a main issue. There is a lot of stretches which can be done pre-season to help prevent such injury. Back and knee related injuries tend to happen a lot due to the constant bending and weight lifting done all day.

"A good diet, filled with healthy sugars and carbohydrates are essential in order to keep going all day. A mix of simple and complex sugars throughout the day will help workers to stay focus and not feel tired as they are burning calories working away.

"We do ask of our workers do stretch their wrists in the morning prior to work commencement in colder weather as it helps reduce injuries if they don't start work on "cold muscles".

"I think pre-work training and after work stretches need to be talked about a bit more as a lot of people still think it's for 'hipsters' and 'hippies'. Opening up conversation about it and taking down the stereotypes that surround it will definitely help people get in the good habits of working out and hopefully be safer at work."

*FTN will run a members profile on Liz Boivin and Tomorrow's Forests in the October issue.*



Photo credits: Brigitte Hunziger for Wald und Holz

### FTN WEB RESOURCES



Preparation and maintenance exercises for planters

Quick guide for injury management

How to eat to keep planting

[www.confor.org.uk/ftnweb](http://www.confor.org.uk/ftnweb)