

## **The Impact of COVID-19 on the Northeast and Appalachian Logging Industry**

***Erika Scott***

*Research Scientist, Northeast Center for Occupational Health and Safety in Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing, Cooperstown, New York, USA*

[Erika.Scott@bassett.org](mailto:Erika.Scott@bassett.org)

***Liane Hirabayashi***

*Northeast Center for Occupational Health and Safety in Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing, Cooperstown, New York, USA*

[Liane.Hirabayashi@bassett.org](mailto:Liane.Hirabayashi@bassett.org)

***Judy Graham***

*Northeast Center for Occupational Health and Safety in Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing, Cooperstown, New York, USA*

[Judith.Graham@bassett.org](mailto:Judith.Graham@bassett.org)

### **ABSTRACT**

#### **Background and Objective(s)**

Early in the pandemic, a New York Times article highlighted the risk of contracting COVID-19 by occupation. It was no surprise that loggers showed up on the low end of the risk scale, both because of outdoor work and being naturally socially distanced. So why would we undertake a large-scale survey of COVID-19 impacts on logging workers across the Northeast? Because we know this public health crisis has ensnared nearly all aspects of our lives, and essential workers (a category that includes loggers) have been hit especially hard. In late 2020, the Northeast Center for Occupational Health and Safety in Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing surveyed loggers across the region on impacts of COVID-19 on their health, family and businesses.

#### **Methods**

Mailing lists were gathered from logger trade organizations in each state. Paper surveys were mailed to loggers in six Northeast states: Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, New York, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. Surveys were returned via postal mail and data entered into REDCap. Record level data was exported from REDCap into SAS 9.4 for statistical analysis.

#### **Results**

Four hundred eighty-four (484) loggers responded to the survey. Nearly 59% of those surveyed, said they knew more than two people who had tested positive and 4% of those asked had tested positive themselves. Many (44%) of the survey respondents indicated that COVID-19 pandemic affected their daily work activities in profound ways including loss of jobs, loss of laborers, loss of market for wood, increased quotas at mills, and significant changes in home life and work responsibilities. Beyond COVID-19, Eighty-three percent (83%) of loggers surveyed in Maine said the digester explosion at the Androscoggin Mill in Jay, ME had affected their business. An additional 18% of loggers surveyed who did not reside in Maine said the closing of that mill also affected their business. Sixty-six percent (66%) of survey respondents who answered the question indicated that they work with more than one person. Of those, that were not owner/operators, over half said their employers did not provide any PPE relating to

the COVID-19 pandemic. If their employer did provide PPE, it was either a face covering (cloth face covering, neck gaiter or bandana) and/or hand sanitizer. However, over half of those indicated that they personally do not use a face covering at work when within 6 feet of coworkers. The same group answered that only about 9% of their co-workers always wore a mask when they were within 6 feet of others at work. Forty two percent of loggers reported that their co-workers never wore a mask when within 6-feet of each other while at work. Additional results will be discussed in the full presentation.

### **Conclusions**

The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected Northeast loggers. These impacts need to be considered by industry stakeholders and policy-makers to best support the industry moving beyond the pandemic and continuing to be a robust sector in the future.

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# PROCEEDINGS

## Proceedings of The Joint 43<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting of Council on Forest Engineering (COFE) & the 53<sup>rd</sup> International Symposium on Forest Mechanization (FORMEC)

### Forest Engineering Family - Growing Forward Together

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