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B.C. experience paves way for reduced half-load haul in Ontario

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By Brett Hanson

The use of tire pressure control (TPC) to reduce the length of spring load restrictions is set to begin this year in Ontario but it has been a proven technology in British Columbia since 2004. Many of the lessons learned in the BC experience are being applied to Ontario including how to convince government to allow the technology's use.

Bill Snell, technical manager of forest operations for Tembec followed the introduction of the technology in British Columbia and is on the ground floor of this application in Ontario. Snell explains the benefits of tire pressure control on the west coast.

"In BC they were using the technology to extend the spring haul season the same as the application in Ontario," Snell said. "It was even greater benefit in BC because of the way their phases are tied together, if you can't move the wood you can't really even cut it because of the smaller landings. Not only did it extend the haul season but it extended the harvest season as well."

Tire pressure control (TPC) or central tire inflation (CTI) allows drivers to control the air pressure in their tire from the cab of the truck with the push of a button. This allows tires to be less inflated in sensitive areas such as bush roads and then re-inflated for highway driving. The result is less damage to roads particularly during wet period like the spring and fall.

"We got the understanding from the BC experience of how the hardware works and the computer systems which monitor and control the tires," Snell said.

The process toward implementing the technology in Ontario was begun in 2005 with Tembec approaching the provincial government and outlining what had been done in BC. *The Working Forest* newspaper also initiated a TPC resolution for Northern Ontario communities which was voted on, passed and sent to the provincial government.

"We worked with the government and demonstrated that we knew what we were doing and could measure the strength of the roads and turn the trucks into more road friendly vehicles," Snell said. "We've been into the trials since 2006 and took a year off to understand the modeling and data a little better and went back to trials in 2008 and last year as well. FPInnovations, FERIC division has played a big role in helping us through this process."

An early convert to the benefits of the tire pressure control is Ryan Bignucolo owner of Northern Haul in Chapleau Ontario who hopes to see technology in use on every vehicle his company takes into the forest.

"Our number one reason for adopting TPC is more truck utilization; the equipment will work for longer periods. It will also give us easier access to the forest; we will be able to get in and out with less trouble. The road will also stay in better condition resulting in less wear and tear on our trucks," Bignucolo said.

Initially, Bignucolo plans to put TPC on all of his forestry trucks, a total of six units and intends to install it on the company's gravel trucks in the future as well.

"It will prolong usage during the spring load restriction as well as shorten downtime on rainy days during the fall," Bignucolo said. "We would use it every day it's a lot less wear and tear on our road which will save us money in the long run. A lot of other companies are pretty skeptical about it but I definitely see the benefits."

The Ontario government has stipulated that the industry must also self monitor the correct use of the technology; something that wasn't needed in the BC application. Snell is confident that the technology will become more widely used once the benefits are fully realized.

"It's on the order of \$25,000 a truck so it's tough with the current state of the industry but I think it should gain in popularity as the program progresses. In building roads we feel there is opportunity because there wouldn't be a need to have as high a standard of road in the summer. Once people see that I think there will be more and more fleet owners who will see the value," Snell said.

"I think anybody who is going off highway with gravel roads will see the advantage there. A lot of forest roads are multi-user so if you are going to change the standard then it makes sense to have all users with that type of equipment," Snell said. "That will be one of the implementation challenges where forest roads are shared; rigs without it are going to have trouble driving on what are called CTI roads without causing damage to the road surface." ◇

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