GOVERNMENT RESPONDS TO CORONER INQUEST FINDINGS

VICTORIA – The Minister of Labour has submitted government’s response to the B.C. Coroner regarding 18 recommendations related to a 2007 traffic accident that killed three farm workers. Actions to address all of the recommendations directed at the Province have been completed or are ongoing.

Actions taken include:

- Legislative amendments to the Employment Standards Act and Motor Vehicle Act to improve the safety of passengers of 15 passenger vans, and farm workers in particular. This included requiring one seatbelt required for every person in a vehicle, with fines for carriers, employers, vehicles owners, and drivers if they allow a vehicle to be driven with more passengers than proper seats.

- Creation of the Inter-Agency Agriculture Compliance Committee in 2007 to bring together the Province, WorkSafeBC and the RCMP to take an integrated approach to farm worker safety. Since then, approximately 1,000 vehicles transporting farm workers have been inspected – and compliance rates have improved. In 2007, approximately 30 per cent or 155 vehicles failed to pass inspection compared to 2009, where only 10 per cent or 24 vehicles failed to pass inspection.

- Increased outreach, particularly in the South Asian community, by WorkSafeBC through advertising and online presence to advise workers and employers of their rights and responsibilities.

The recommendations were made by a jury following an inquest held Dec. 7-11, 2009. They included increased vehicle inspections, seatbelt capacity provisions, speeding and licensing enforcement and increased education for farm workers and employers.

The coroner’s jury recommendations were directed to the Minister of Labour, WorkSafeBC, the Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General, the Office of the Superintendent of Motor Vehicles, the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, the Inter-Agency Agricultural Compliance Committee and the Attorney General of British Columbia. The Ministry of Labour co-ordinated the response for government.

Immediately following the accident in 2007, government proactively instituted a number of measures designed to foster and improve the health and safety of workers in the agriculture sector. Many of these activities are coincident to the coroner’s recommendations, and in some cases government is preparing to move forward with additional improvements.
B.C. has some of the toughest mandatory penalties in Canada for contraventions of employment standards legislation and regulations. Penalties escalate from $500 for a first offence to $2,500 for a second offence and $10,000 for a third offence. Since 2007, more than $180,000 in fines and tickets have been issued by agencies represented on the Inter-Agency Agriculture Compliance Committee in conjunction with roadside vehicle inspections.

To read government’s response to the recommendations in English or Punjabi, visit [http://www.gov.bc.ca/farmworkers](http://www.gov.bc.ca/farmworkers).

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