



**Media release from the Southern Wood Council
December 2, 2008**

Southern Wood Council works to eliminate drug and alcohol abuse from the workplace.

The Southern Wood Council has welcomed a new national New Zealand forestry drug and alcohol code of practice.

The NZ Forest Owners Association (NZFOA) has rolled out its policy to forest owners throughout New Zealand over recent weeks, inviting adoption from all individual businesses operating in the forest sector.

The objective of the policy, and the Code of Practice of which it is part, is to minimise accident rates in New Zealand plantation forests.

This move reinforces the Southern Wood Council's work in this area.

The Council has had a charter agreement to implement an Alcohol and Drug Free Workplace Policy in the lower South island since 2003. Most southern forest owners and contractors have adopted the agreement to suit their individual situations.

This agreement covers all aspects of the industry, including silviculture, harvesting, and wood processing operations. It is based on the same approach as the new national policy, which sees drug and alcohol testing conducted on all prospective new employees, options for just cause testing and (for some businesses) random testing of existing employees.

Chairman Grant Dodson said adoption of the agreement locally has worked well, as forest and mill owners have worked together to run drug and alcohol-free workplaces, as part of a continual programme of improving health and safety in the workplace.

A co-ordinated, nation-wide approach to drug and alcohol testing through this new FOA initiative has meant companies throughout New Zealand will now have the ability to put similar practices in place, setting the standard and collectively improving health safety and performance as an industry.

"As employers, we are looking at what we can do to ensure safety and prevent alcohol and drug abuse. Drug testing is now an important tool for us in ensuring the safety of our workers and creating a safe work environment in the forest," Mr Dodson said. "Drugs are a



huge problem in New Zealand society, and the forestry industry is giving a clear message that we will not employ people who abuse these substances in our organisations.”

NZ Forest Owners Association president Peter Berg said the industry is targeting zero fatalities and serious accidents.

“As a Code of Practice it sets standards that all forest employers need to comply with if they are to meet their legal obligation to provide their employees with a safe workplace,” Mr Berg said.

“Forestry is about skilled people working hard, using cutting tools and heavy machinery in a team environment. They need to be professional, alert and at the top their game all day, every day. Otherwise they put themselves and their workmates at risk.

“Most staff and contractors are committed to being professional in everything they do. They recognise that this won’t happen if they have workmates who are on drugs, or who drank too much the night before.”

The NZFOA introduced its new policy to Otago and Southland forest owners and contractors at a function at JT’s Golf centre near Dunedin recently.

The Association outlined the objectives, and introduced the policy template it has developed which all New Zealand forest industry employers can adopt with or without adaption, a code of practice, and workplace drug and alcohol free education programme for staff and supervisors which includes a 'A safe workplace is a drug-free workplace' brochure http://www.nzfoa.org.nz/index.php?/File_libraries_resources.

It indicated the initial response from forestry contractors has been supportive. Signaling that drug testing is becoming the norm, rather than the exception, is another step towards changing the image of the industry.

The Southern Wood Council Inc was set up in 2001 to promote, encourage and coordinate the sustainable economic development of the forest products industry in Otago and Southland. One of a few truly independent groups of its type in New Zealand, it includes all the major forest owners within the region (ownership or management of over 140,000 hectares of production forests with an annual harvest of over 1.2 million m³ of wood), the larger wood processing and manufacturing companies, the port authorities, and each of the three economic development agencies from local councils.



For further information contact Southern Wood Council chairman Grant Dodson on 03- 467-7722.