



## **Ergonomic Topic: Pike Poles**

Applications within forestry industry: Sawmills and Veneer & board Mills

### **How the Job is Usually Done**

Pushing and pulling logs is one of the most strenuous manual tasks in forestry mills. This task is generally done with a pike pole and if proper body mechanics are not used there is an increased risk of a sprain or strain injury to the upper back, shoulders and lower back.

### **Ergonomic Concerns**

Two different types of strength are required when using a pike pole: the force used to move the log and the grip strength used when holding the pike pole. Posture is also important when using a pike pole. When you hold an awkward posture, you cause your tendons, muscles and ligaments to work harder. Appropriate length and proper maintenance of the pike pole are very critical to the job. If the tip of your pike pole is too sharp, you will have to use increased force to pull it out. If the tip is too dull, more effort will be required to stick it into the log. A pole that's too long or too short forces the user to adopt awkward body positions and requires more force to maneuver. The upper back, shoulders and lower back are common areas that are injured when pike poles are used improperly.

### **Recommended Adjustments**

When using a pike pole, make sure you use your leg and buttock muscles with little help from your lower back muscles. This is important because your leg and buttock muscles are larger and stronger. When holding a pike pole, use a power grip, with the force primarily between the fingers and palm, as this will reduce some of the awkward positioning of the wrist joint. Proper-fitting gloves are also important when using a pike pole. Gloves that don't fit properly can increase the likelihood of an injury, as more force will be required to keep them on. Employers should encourage workers to take regular stretch breaks and strengthen the required muscles groups through exercise to help decrease the chance of injury. Workers should be proactive by reporting any signs of discomfort early to their supervisors so that any substandard conditions can be addressed before the problem gets worse.

## **Ontario Forestry Safe Workplace Association**

For further information please contact OFSWA Consultant/Trainer – Ergonomist  
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