

'WALL OF WOOD' – KEEP THAT LOOKOUT!

A potentially catastrophic near miss has lessons for all pilots – even if they check NOTAMs.

A log hauler was using an aerial cable slung across a valley 600 ft (180 m) above the ground. The workers stopped for smoko and lowered the cable to the ground.

Almost immediately a military helicopter came into view and swept along the valley in the vicinity of where the cable had been suspended only moments before.

The operation had not been formally notified by NOTAM.

The military pilot had no idea of the logger's activities and no idea how close they came to a potentially catastrophic event.

The CAA has since produced guidance for the forestry industry, including the criticality of having a NOTAM notified, as well as the desirability of letting nearby aerodromes, agricultural operations, and aero clubs know of the planned activity.

It advises operators to also make use of lighting, markers or other visible warning signs on the hazard; and to even consider taking out an advertisement in the local papers.

CAA Aeronautical Services Officer Robert Shanks investigated the incident for the CAA.

He says that while the guidance he's developed for the forestry industry will help logging operators realise their obligations to aviation safety, pilots must remain alert.

"All pilots know they should always check for NOTAMs along their planned route," Robert says.

"But this event highlights the absence of a NOTAM is no guarantee there's no planned activity around their flight path – particularly over mature forest areas.

"They should maintain a high degree of situational awareness," he says. "Flying through or across valleys, they should be constantly on the lookout for hillside scarring, dust, and of course, hauling ropes."

CAA analyst Joe Dewar has worked with the Transport Agency, Worksafe, and Maritime NZ, analysing risks associated with forestry transport.

"What's coming is called the 'wall of wood' by industry groups," Joe says. "All those forests planted during the 'green gold rush' of the early 1990s are now reaching maturity and will be logged over the next decade.

"That will have consequences for aviation, and particularly helicopter operations.

"There'll be more low level hazards, like cable systems, in forests that operators might have been flying over – hazard-free – for years." ➤



// Pilots should keep a keen lookout, even if there are no NOTAMs out for their planned route.