

ENVIRONMENTAL AUDITING OF FORESTRY OVERVIEW OF 2003-2004 PROGRAM

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BACKGROUND

EPA Victoria is responsible for appointing independent environmental auditors to audit timber harvesting on public land in Victoria. This will be implemented using the Victorian statutory environmental audit system administered by EPA (EPA Publication 902, *Environmental Auditing in Victoria*).

The third party audit will focus on compliance of timber harvesting operations with the *Code of Forest Practices for Timber Production 1996*. Audit findings will be documented and reported to the public.

The code provides goals and guidelines for timber production on public and private land in Victoria. Implementation of the code and the monitoring of compliance by forest operators with the requirements of the code on public land is the responsibility of the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

In 2002-2003, the first independent forest audit assessed timber harvesting operations in the Central Gippsland, East Gippsland, Central and Portland Forest Management Areas (FMAs). The 2002-2003 forest audit report is available on EPA Victoria's website.

FORESTRY PROGRAM OUTLINE

The key components of this program are to:

- Conduct audits of compliance of timber harvesting operations with the code; and
- Establish and co-ordinate a consultative process.

The outcomes of the audit program are expected to be of benefit to the Department of Sustainability and Environment, the forestry industry and the community by providing an objective and independent assessment of the status of compliance of timber harvesting operations with the code. Department of Sustainability and Environment will be able to use the independent information to assist sound decision-making for continual improvement in forestry operations.

There are four distinct phases in the conduct of the forest audit:

- Planning;
- FMA and coupe selection and information gathering;
- Field assessment; and
- Reporting.

Forest Audit Program 2003-2004

EPA has engaged an environmental auditor appointed under the *Environment Protection Act 1970* to conduct the audit of the 2003-2004 timber

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harvesting season. The auditor for this year's program also undertook the 2002-2003 forest audit. A team that consists of individuals with expertise in forestry, ecology and soil science will provide support to the auditor.

Audits by their nature examine a sample of activities. Timber harvesting occurs in planned areas of forest, of variable size and shape, known as coupes. This year, in addition to normal timber harvesting operations, fire-salvage harvesting operations (in areas burnt during the 2003 Alpine Fires) and recently upgraded or constructed timber harvesting roads will be subject to audit. It is planned that 35 coupes and up to 8km of roads will be audited. This will represent between five to 10 per cent of all coupes harvested during the 2003-04 timber harvesting season. Coupes from selected FMA's will be assessed to represent the range of timber harvesting operations undertaken across the state.

The scope of the audit does not include forestry planning processes, however the audit will consider planning insofar as it impinges on environmental values associated with timber harvesting operations.

Timber harvesting operations in the Central, Dandenong, North East, Otways and Tambo will be assessed during the 2003-04 forest audit. Timber harvesting operations in the Otways and Midlands FMAs were selected as part of the Western Region to be subject to audit. For these two FMAs the auditor undertook a combined risk-based coupe selection process. This resulted in timber harvesting operations in the Otways being identified for audit. The selection of FMA's and coupes by the auditor

followed a similar approach to that adopted in the 2002-03 forest audit.

Information on the methodology for assessment will be made available once it is finalised by the auditor.

Planned timelines for the 2003-04 forest audit are:

Planning:	February - March
FMA and coupe selection and information gathering:	March – April
Field Assessment:	May - June
Reporting (including compilation of results and verification):	July – October

Consultation

EPA is seeking to consult widely with all stakeholders who have an interest in timber harvesting in Victoria for their views and input into the 2003-2004 audit program.

This consultation has included providing input into the selection of Forest Management Areas to be audited this year.

EPA will contact stakeholders in the FMAs that will be subject to audit to seek input into and provide information on the program.

Stakeholders and interested individuals will be kept informed of the progress of the 2003-04 audit and updates will be placed on EPA's website.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information and updates on Victoria's forestry auditing program, contact EPA Victoria's Environmental Audit Unit or visit EPA's website.

Website: www.epa.vic.gov.au/envaudit

E-mail: forestry.audit@epa.vic.gov.au