

## West Fraser Mills: Rapidly Swinging Into Action To Produce Results

<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Provider</b>	West Fraser Mills
<b>Location</b>	<a href="#">Western Canada</a>
<b>Highlights</b>	Eurocan had been operating for 40 years; the announcement of its closure on October 28, 2009 came as a shock to the workers and community of Kitimat and meant the loss of 567 jobs.
<b>Overview</b>	In October 2009, West Fraser Mills announced the closure of the Eurocan pulp and paper mill in Kitimat, BC. The District of Kitimat, the City of Terrace and the RuralBC Secretariat, along with many community partners worked together with West Fraser and the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers (CEP) Locals 228 and 1127 to develop a worker transition strategy. A group was also formed to try to organize a worker buy-out of the mill, but the attempt was ultimately unsuccessful.
<b>Issues Targeted</b>	<p>With few other alternatives for employment within Kitimat, many individuals and some families would have to leave town to find employment. Given the potential impact on its tax base, the closure also would have a negative impact on the District and surrounding communities like the City of Terrace.</p> <p>In addition, numerous workers lacked a Grade 12 diploma, so would have to upgrade before being able to apply for many other jobs or retraining courses.</p>
<b>Key Features</b>	<p>The adjustment program for Eurocan had two prongs: one, a program to help transition workers to other jobs or retraining and two, a union and community effort to enable an employee buyout of the mill.</p> <p>1)Employee Transition Program</p> <p>Shortly after West Fraser announced the closure, the company assigned a person from Employee Relations to begin to coordinate assistance to workers. Early on, she also met with Coast Mountain School, North Coast District Education to explore education upgrading.</p> <p>In the month following the announcement, the union met with all workers at the mill, in larger meetings and for those who requested it, one on one. With them, they had a</p>

package outlining the various options available to workers in terms of retraining, services available, forms to fill out and so forth. West Fraser, Kitimat Community Services Society (Employment Services Centre) and the Terrace Northwest Training, Career Counselling and Employment Centre and the Union organized sessions on financial and pension planning. They also set up a job fair in November 2009 for Eurocan employees that included oil companies and other firms from outside the Kitimat area.

Once the mill closed in February 2010, an outside Transition Office opened with a mandate to “position displaced workers for re-employment and ensure appropriate resources are co-ordinated and provided.” The employee from the West Fraser office continued to staff the outside office and received additional staff support (for one person for two months from the United Way contract). The office operated two days per week in the City of Terrace offices and three days per week in the District of Kitimat Courthouse. Eurocan paid the employee until April 2010, then the Ministry of Social Services funded her salary until the office closed in September 2010.

Workers came to the Office to set up their Employment Insurance benefits, take financial courses, work on their resumes, job search and also meet with fellow workers. The office also got people involved in developing a book on Eurocan for the workers, as a way of keeping them engaged and facilitating adjustment. The Office set up a database of workers and regularly e-mailed and kept in touch, informing them of upcoming workshops and courses and finding out their status.

The Ministry of Social Services also provided funding for the Kitimat Employment Services (KES) to offer assistance to Eurocan workers. Its services included:

- Extended hours of operation to 6:00 pm on weekdays and 10-1:00 on Saturdays from November 2009 to February 2010. It also provided after hours and before hours appointments to accommodate shift workers. Staff hours were increased: available full time were three counsellors, two resource workers, a program coordinator and others who worked with workers before and after shifts. In a space of two months, the resource worker created 125 resumes and staff helped 150 workers with Employment Insurance (EI) applications. The KES maintained a trades board for Eurocan workers, in addition to its regular job board listing positions in Kitimat and regional labour markets.
- After hours visits to the mill site, seven times before the mill closed, in addition to 20 visits to the local CEP union office and participation in Eurocan job fairs.
- Creating brochures, manuals and workbooks for Eurocan workers.
- Workshops on interview preparation, job search strategies, resume and cover letter, computer skills and hosted workshops put on by outside agencies, including TRADES,

RBC and Investors Group. Workers could also receive guidance on using self assessment tools for job search and career decision including Choices and ESPORT.

- Assisting all drop in participants from Eurocan who accessed, computers, fax machines, photocopying, job board, resource assistance, scanning capabilities, phone use and provided information regarding multiple programs available, schooling information, and booking of appointments to see consultants.
- Providing and continuing to provide one to one services to Eurocan employees in all of the above areas related to job search and training. As of March 2011, the Centre also provides monthly follow ups to Eurocan employees to continue to support and guide them through transition process. It relays new information to participants through phone calls or emails.

Some workers were able to take advantage of BC government funding for retraining. The Community Development Trust provided \$5,000 tuition allowance benefit for those with two years working experience in the forest industry. Many others availed themselves of the local community services guide, which the communities of Terrace and Kitimat, with support from the RuralBC Secretariat prepared shortly after the mill closure was announced.

## 2) Attempting to Organize an Employee Buyout of the Mill

Almost immediately after West Fraser announced the mill closure, a team formed to organize a feasibility study for a potential employee buyout of the mill. Over 90% of the CEP Local 228 members supported this effort. Calling itself the Eurocan Industrial Viability Group (EIVG) the group eventually included:

- The District of Kitimat
- Local 298 of the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union (CEP)
- Local 1127 of the Communications, Energy and Papermakers Union(CEP)
- Envision Financial Kitimat
- Kitimat Chamber of Commerce

The team began meeting regularly in November 2009.

The union locals worked continuously to get support from Kitimat. According to its Local 228 President, Mary Murphy, "We requested support from individual citizens, community groups, town businesses and the Chamber of Commerce. We met with the mayor and council of the District of Kitimat, the mayor of [nearby] Terrace and several Terrace councilors. We made presentations to the Canadian Labour Congress and received support from the president of the Canadian Auto Workers and other unions. We met with local First Nations, with provincial government officials and the Northwest British Columbia Forest Coalition representatives."

	<p>With financial support of \$60,000 from the government of BC, \$ 65,000 from CEP Local 228 and CEP national the EVIG was able to fund \$175,000 study on alternative business models to make the mill viable. They hired Pöyry, a global consulting and engineering firm. The union also spoke with workers at the Harmac Mill in Nanaimo, BC, who had bought the mill and were making it a success.</p> <p>Pöyry issued its Eurocan Mill Viability Assessment, Summary Report on March 31 2010. The report stated that the mill could be viability again, although in a different form. It could manufacture sack Kraft paper and 270 jobs could return to the mill. By the end of June 2010, the EIVG gained interest from four potential buyers. In addition, it proposed forming a co-operative to run the mill with the investors, with citizens of Kitimat also investing in the newly formed corporation.</p> <p>By June 2010, however, West Fraser had sold and begun dismantling the machines at the mill. As of March 2011, no buyer had been found, and the employee buy-out effort appeared to have been unsuccessful.</p>
<b>Key Results</b>	<p>As of May 2010, the Eurocan Transition Office had helped 110 workers find new full-time jobs and assisted 80 others into education courses. Many workers returned to complete their high school diplomas. People with trades qualifications tended to be picked up by other firms, such as Canadian National or companies in the oil sands.</p> <p>According to CEP 228, as of March 2011, about 150 of the Eurocan employees were still looking for full-time employment or retraining. The Eurocan Viability Group is working to make sure the Eurocan site is fully remediated.</p>
<b>Contact Details</b>	Eurocan Mill, Kitimat, British Columbia
<b>Sectors</b>	<a href="#">Manufacturing</a>
<b>Projects</b>	<a href="#">Worker Adjustment</a>
<b>Sponsors</b>	<a href="#">Business: large (500+)</a>
<b>Target Audiences</b>	<a href="#">Older workers</a> <a href="#">School-leavers</a> <a href="#">Workers</a>
<b>Target Audience</b>	The 567 workers laid off as a result of the closure of the Eurocan pulp and paper mill.

<b>Details</b>	
<b>Initiative Types</b>	<a href="#">Practice</a>
<b>Funding Mechanisms</b>	<p>The funding for the transition office staff came from West Fraser and the Government of British Columbia, Ministry of Social Services for the main transition position. Funding for the other position came from the United Way of Canada and Northern Savings Credit Union. The District of Kitimat and the District of Terrace also contributed office space for the Transition Centres in each of their communities.</p> <p>The BC Rural Secretariat, CEP National and the members of the EIVG all contributed substantial time, effort and funding in their attempts to generate an employee buyout of the mill.</p> <p>The total amount contributed was \$175,000 plus in-kind contributions of office space, a staff person and expanded community service agency services.</p>
<b>Partnerships</b>	<p>The Eurocan mill closure necessitated a response from the entire community. Support in various forms came from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CEP Locals 228 and 1127</li> <li>• CEP National</li> <li>• West Fraser</li> <li>• District of Kitimat</li> <li>• Kitimat Community Services Society</li> <li>• United Way along with financial support from Northern Savings Credit Union</li> <li>• City of Terrace</li> <li>• Terrace Northwest Training, Career Counselling and Employment Centre</li> <li>• Envision Financial Kitimat</li> <li>• Kitimat Chamber of Commerce</li> <li>• Government of BC, Rural Secretariat</li> <li>• Ministry of Social Services</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges</b>	<p>Some of the challenges that facing the laid-off workers included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of Grade 12: Many workers had not completed high school, so had difficulties accessing retraining courses or getting new jobs. Some had been out of school for more than 30 years and were nervous and apprehensive about re-entering formal education.</li> <li>• Age concerns: Workers 40 and over had difficulties securing new jobs-many employers were reluctant to hire older workers without trades related qualifications.</li> <li>• Funding: Some workers were interested in retraining, but it meant leaving the</li> </ul>

	<p>community to go to Prince George or Vancouver. The Community Trust Funding of \$5000 only covered tuition, so workers have to cover their own travel and expenses costs. Some left their families behind in the region, others moved from the area entirely. This depopulation was a blow to the local communities, since it resulted in a smaller tax base and the closure of schools and services.</p>
<p><b>Conclusion</b></p>	<p>To help workers successfully, it is important to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Start Early:</b> Shortly after the announcement of the closure, West Fraser, the Union and the local community immediately swung into action to help workers. This rapidity is important, since many workers were shocked and needed time and assistance to process the loss of their employment.</li> <li>• <b>Work together:</b> Early on, the local community worked cooperatively to help workers and try to save the mill. The company, union, governments, local community groups and community organizations all worked together cooperatively. These joint efforts saved time and money and enabled more effective worker support.</li> <li>• <b>Learn from others:</b> Those involved with the Transition Office got advice from employees in West Fraser who had been involved in mill closures. They also sought advice from the community of McKenzie, which a few years previously had shut down a mill. Local 228 enlisted the support of the Canadian Worker Co-operative Federation (CWCF) which helps workers on the many aspects of starting worker co-ops.</li> </ul>