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Next plant to open could be Canfor-Vavenby

By [Keith McNeill - Clearwater Times](#)

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There's nothing definite yet but, if lumber markets continue to improve, Canfor-Vavenby could reopen soon.

"They haven't committed to anything but during our discussions with Canfor they said the next plant they would like to get rolling would be Vavenby," said Warren Oja, financial secretary for Steelworkers Local 1-417 in Kamloops. "I hope that sooner rather than later we'll have something more substantial to say."

Canfor and United Steelworkers Union announced last week that they had reached an agreement for a new contract.

The announcement followed a ratification vote by union members at Canfor's 14 operations in British Columbia, including Canfor-Vavenby.

The two Canfor operations within Local 1-417, Vavenby and Radium, both voted in favor of the new contract, said Oja.

The previous contract between the union and Canfor expired last July.

The new four-year deal contains several measures to increase flexibility.

“In the scheme of things it is probably a fair deal for the times,” said Oja. “In terms of pay it isn’t anything to jump up and down about, except possibly for profit sharing. It’s structured so that, as the industry gets more profitable, the profits will be shared with the people who work in the industry.”

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“Hopefully that happens soon,” he added. “It’s springtime now and there are lots of signs of things getting better. There’s not a lot of lumber floating around and there are new markets opening up, such as China. The price of lumber has stabilized above \$250. Madison’s (a lumber industry magazine) thinks it will spike to over \$300 or \$315. That could mean reduced taxes at the American border.”

The four-year agreement includes no pay raises during the first two years and two per cent raises for each of the second two.

Holiday pay for Boxing Day will be deferred and holiday pay overall will be reduced by three per cent. The money saved will be returned to the workers when the lumber industry turns around or on Dec. 31, 2011, whichever comes first.

Possibly as a result of the increased layoffs in the industry, seniority will get greater protection,

retroactive to last July

“Anyone who was on the list at that time will still be on the list during the four-year period,” said Oja.

Under the previous agreement, workers' seniority was only protected for two years.

Trades began receiving a 50 cents per hour increase as of last week, and will get another 50 cents per hour on July 1, 2011.

Apprentices will get their tuition and textbooks paid for. Other provisions include a medical travel plan, life insurance, permanent/partial closure language and safety language.

"This agreement sets a new positive tone for our industry. It provides some relief from the economic issues we are facing and a profit based performance bonus that will reward our hourly workers," said Canfor president and CEO Jim Shepard. "This sets the stage for enhancing the teamwork approach at Canfor that will lead to high performance at all of our operations," Shepard added.

The new agreement applies to approximately 2,300 Canfor employees.


The Canfor-Steelworkers agreement is expected to serve as a template for other agreements with forest companies operating in the B.C. Interior.

Canfor's Vavenby sawmill has been shut down since last summer, waiting for

significant and sustained market improvements. About 200 jobs have been affected.

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