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Mill startup date unknown

By SARAH A. ZIMMERMAN

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THE TERRACE Lumber Company (TLC) has closed its sawmill for the third time in two months, but this time a re-opening date isn't known.

The problem this time is the price of lumber in the United States has dropped 14 per cent, more than enough to make the mill here uneconomical. Unlike the previous two closures, where officials were able to target a start up date, this time it depends entirely on when the market turns around.

"Until the market picks up until the point where we can be cash positive," says general manager Wayne Haw about a potential start up date. The mill's planer and dry kilns will keep operating for now.

The troubles plaguing the mill are many and include a high Canadian dollar, a fluctuating North American market, inconsistent wood supply, difficulties unloading chips and hog fuel and high US softwood lumber duties.

Despite some optimism that a softwood lumber deal is being worked out, companies such as TLC can't yet count on getting money back from duties paid.

"We've paid more than \$1.25 million duty and we expect to get the majority of that back at somepoint," says Haw about softwood tariffs paid since the mill started Aug. 29 of last year. "Meanwhile because it's not resolved yet, we continue to pay more than 20 per cent duty every day on US-bound shipments."

TLC board chair John Ryan says having that money back would provide a significant boost to the company's ability to operate. The challenges continue to be something of a vicious circle. When the company shut down its mill and log yard before, logging companies were affected. But when the mill was to open again, it faced a problem in lining up enough wood.

"That's life isn't it? I can't imagine that for any of us in any endeavour that if it were so smooth that we didn't have any ups and downs it would be terribly boring," Ryan said of the closure. "We just don't have the financial capacity to take a long downturn in the

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lumber market."

Steelworkers Union local 2171 president Darrel Wong confirmed unionized workers at the mill were told the closure is temporary.

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