



Announcer:

It's time for the *IHSA Safety Podcast*.

Ken Rayner:

Welcome to the *IHSA Safety Podcast*. I'm your host, Ken Rayner. On today's episode, we are joined by IHSA's Brad Bird, star of our video series on winter driving, which can be found on IHSA's YouTube channel. As well, Brad is IHSA's Manager of Health and Safety Education and Accredited Programs, and one of our transportation subject matter experts. Welcome to the *IHSA Safety Podcast*, Brad. Great to have you here.

Brad Bird:

Thanks, Ken. It's my pleasure to be here.

Ken Rayner:

All right. So Brad, I know just a little bit about what we're going to talk about today, probably just enough to be dangerous, regarding the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario [MTO]'s Driver Certification Program. And from what I understand, it's a terrific option for employers to either upgrade or renew their classified driving licenses of their employees. And I think from what you've told me in the past, really, not intentionally, it's a well-kept secret, but it shouldn't be a well-kept secret, because this should be a program that everyone is familiar with, which is why we're doing a podcast.

So, Brad, let's lead into that first question. What is the Ontario Ministry of Transportation's Driver Certification Program, which is also known as the DCP?

Brad Bird:

Thanks, Ken. Great question. So, let's start with the Driver Certification Program. It's something that was created many, many, many years ago, and I can tell you, as a driver, I started out in the transportation industry as a shunter. And shunting trailers for Domtar in Caledonia, Ontario. And we had a Fleet Signing Authority way back when, and he helped me to get my Class AZ license. So I'm thinking back, Ken, that's probably 40-plus years ago. And I was a recipient of having my driver's license basically go from a Class C to a Class A license at the time through a signing authority. So the system's been around a long time.

It's a voluntary program which gives an organization the authority for the Ministry of Transportation to train and test their employees or students for the purpose of upgrading or renewing their classified driver's license and endorsements. All employers or students who successfully complete the training and testing under the DCP will obtain an upgraded driver's license. So the program keeps its integrity, as external auditors and the MTO will monitor the delivery and maintenance of the DCP delivered by an organization.

So if an organization applies to the MTO, and they have authority to train and deliver the program, the MTO will ensure that they keep those standards so they can't shortcut the system. And in most cases today, I truly believe that employers who are using this system, when they train and test a driver, they're trained and tested to a higher standard than maybe someone even going to a drive test center and getting an upgraded driver's license or commercial driver's license that way.

Ken Rayner:

Okay. Okay. So this is a program that allows employers and other entities to basically have their employees or their students successfully complete a training and testing program that will allow them to have their licenses upgraded.

Brad Bird:

Correct.

Ken Rayner:

Okay. I'm interested. It sounds like it could be very beneficial to those entities as well as to the students or the employees. So how would a company go about registering for the MTO Driver Certification Program, Brad?

Brad Bird:

Well, there's an online process through the MTO office. So if you even Google, "MTO DCP," you can get an online application and organizations can then complete the application. Different organizations may have different needs, but commonly it's larger transportation companies that will do this, and municipalities, so on and so forth. They will set this up and complete it.

Once that's done, you'll sign a contract between the MTO and the applying company. The applying company must then develop and submit a detailed training and testing plan or program for Ministry approval. So, once I've got the contract signed, that's not the end of it. I have to show them that I'm actually going to be a good employer, a good citizen on the roads, if you will, by putting a program together that's going to not only give my drivers just enough information to pass a test but also to keep them safe on the roadway.

Once that program is submitted and the Ministry approves that program, the company will be referred to as having a recognized authority. I'll have a recognized authority, and then there's some other things I have to do after the recognized authority. I basically have to have somebody that's going to oversee the program and its integrity. So I have to name a person within my organization, usually in senior management, and that person is called a Recognized Authority Official under the Ministry. Or we short-form a lot of these phrases, so we call it an RAO. So it's a company management official who'll be directly responsible for the administration and maintenance of their organization's submitted program, and the staff would deliver the program.

So if I submit a program, I can't shortcut it. I have to deliver everything in that program to the staff. If I want to do more, I can do more than but I can't do less than. So I have my Recognized Authority Official. And then that Recognized Authority Official will require one or more Signing Authorities, we call SAs.

Again, short form down. An SA is a Ministry-approved trainer and tester who will deliver the program training and testing on behalf of the recognized authority.

Ken Rayner:

Okay. So let's go back. The recognized authority is the entity that is being granted that status by the MTO. Then you have a Recognized Authority Official, RAO, who is a person under that recognized authority [RA]. And then you also have signing authorities who are also employees of that organization. So the RA is the actual firm, the RAO is a person or an employee with that organization, as are the Signing Authorities. Is that right, Brad?

Brad Bird:

That is correct.

Ken Rayner:

Okay. And what about the types of organizations that are eligible to participate in the Driver Certification Program? What are those, Brad?

Brad Bird:

The Ministry has some rules when it comes to who could apply to have a recognized authority. They look at organizations who will be regularly upgrading a driver's license to a commercial license. Some good examples of this would be school bus companies. So school bus companies may have a stay-at-home parent with children who would like a part-time job but they don't have a class B license. But they do have a Class G license. So, the school bus company then would have recognized authority, they would bring the person with the G license in. They would train them to the standard that's been submitted to the MTO and then they would test them, and on successful completion, their license would be upgraded to that Class B license. So, a school bus organization is a very common type of organization who may use Signing Authorities. Other organizations, quite commonly, are large commercial fleet. So the MTO basically likes to see fleets with 25-or-more vehicles or commercial vehicles in their fleet, because they will need to have drivers.

And the big bonus there that I find is you can have staff within your organization and help them to be successful in knowledge, and from the company's perspective, a little bit more versatile, if we want to call it that. Because now the organization may have somebody that's working in the wash bay, washing trucks, but they want that person in the wash bay to have the AZ license. Now, the person in the wash bay may take a load on a Saturday because they've got the AZ license. So if a driver's spot becomes available, now the person in the wash bay can apply to have that role as a driver.

So, again, they're moving up within the organization. And instead of saying, "I can't do that load Saturday, I have no driver's left," the organization can take from other folks in the organization who have an AZ license to be able to offer their services and get more work done.

Ken Rayner:

Excellent. And I think also, in addition, you have schools like Humber College that would offer it. And I know that ourselves as a safety organization, somewhat in the same way. Right? So those types of employers, and as you said, large fleets, colleges, safety associations, are typically the ones, I guess, that are applying for this program, right?

Brad Bird:

Absolutely. For the most part, that's really and truly who we see out there doing it. Municipalities quite often will do that as well. So in the municipal sector, there was a lot. Especially with the fire departments. In fact, interesting note, the volunteer fire system is the largest classified licensed upgrade. So the class D license is the largest classified license upgrade in Ontario at this point.

Ken Rayner:

And you would know something about that, wouldn't you, Mr. Bird?

Brad Bird:

I would. I've been a volunteer firefighter now...I will be in my fortieth year this year.

Ken Rayner:

Wow. Wow. That's amazing, Brad. Wow. Good on you. Congrats on that. Okay, so we've talked about a few of the benefits. There must be some more. Maybe we can just get into a little bit more detail, Brad. What are some additional benefits of this Ministry of Transportation's program for Ontario companies?

Brad Bird:

I'll say the biggest benefit I see with the program is that drivers are trained in a way that they meet, or, in most cases, exceed the MTO training standards. I look at my son—he upgraded his license recently and went through a training provider to do that. The training provider gave my son the necessary skills to go to a drive test and be successful, and I truly believe that the training was fantastic that he was given. But some of the things that are missing is that when he went to the company's... Going through as a power line technician—and he went to a company as a co-op student—he didn't know a lot about their equipment. He didn't know a lot about their internal policies and procedures. He had to learn all those things after he got to that organization. If an organization is going through the driver certification process and they have a training standard, they build all those things into the training standard.

So the big benefit I see is if a company is training and testing a driver internally, when they have that classified license, they're ready to go to work. They already know the company's policies and procedures. They're trained on the equipment they're going to be driving. Being involved in transportation for many years, one of the things that I know would never happen is if a person's not ready to pass a test, extra training would be given and making sure that that person is ready to be tested. So, as long as I've got my program standards that I've sent into the MTO—my training program I've submitted—once that training program is complete, I could do a test, but if a driver still needs a little tweaking, could be backing or maybe progressive shifting, I'm likely to take that driver and work a little bit more with the driver on those areas to make sure they're going to be successful.

Whereas in school setting, in some cases, people will not pay the extra dollars to the school because let's face it, the schools are not going to give their services away. So nothing against schools. There's a lot of great training schools out there, but when the training's done internally, they want to make sure that that driver's going to be successful, not only in the testing but after the testing when they're driving that company's equipment. Because, let's face it, most companies have their name on the side and that's a traveling billboard going down the roadway. They really want that driver trained well.

Ken Rayner:

Yeah, that's excellent, Brad. I believe that in terms of an organization and the benefits for the employee and the organization. So let me just repeat back what I heard you say. So what I was hearing was if an organization is participating in this Driver Certification Program, they're using all of their practices and policies and procedures and their own equipment to train their drivers. So when those drivers are ready to go, then they already have familiarity with all of the equipment and how to do it the company way. That's how they've been taught, so they're just that much further ahead. I think you were saying, they're just that much closer to being work-ready, to be able to get going, and get going with the equipment and via the policies and the procedures that they're going to find at the company at which they work. Sounds like a really smart idea to be involved in this program, especially if you're a large organization with, as you said, 25-or-more vehicles in your fleet.

Brad Bird:

For sure. Absolutely.

Ken Rayner:

Wow. Okay. What about the part that IHSA plays in this Driver Certification Program? So what part do we play, Brad?

Brad Bird:

Well, simply put, we train the trainers. So the Signing Authorities are who we usually see at IHSA. Signing Authorities will come to us and they're looking to hone their skills, if you will. So our 10-day *Fleet Signing Authority* program. We have an *MTO Fleet Signing Authority Recertification* program, we have an *Air Brake Instructor* program. They're all recognized and approved by MTO's DCP standards, and graduates of our 10-day *Fleet Signing Authority* program and our *Air Brake Instructor* program are eligible to become signing authorities for the purpose of upgrading or renewing classified driver's licenses and endorsements. So, they're going to come to us and we're going to give them tools to do the job correctly.

Ken Rayner:

Okay. So, you mentioned IHSA's 10-day *Fleet Signing Authority* program, Brad. What does that look like?

Brad Bird:

Well, I'll maybe give you just a bit of an overview of what's in the program. Day 1, we start with principles of adult education. One of the things that we pride ourselves with here at IHSA is not just delivering content but delivering content in a way that people can take information away, back to the workplaces, and can use the training. To do that, you have to understand how adults learn. So that's Day 1.

Day 2 is designing instruction. I want to think about my previous experience. When I first started. I would've loved to have had a fleet program because I'd put a bunch of things on a slide. Back then it was acetates—it was a long time ago—and put them on the overhead projector.

Ken Rayner:

Hold on, Brad. There's a whole bunch of people that are under 30 looking up the term acetates right now.

Brad Bird:

That's good.

Ken Rayner:

We should pause and let them do that.

Brad Bird:

I think back, and we would basically just go ahead and deliver content, but we need to design instruction based on how adults learn. So that's Day 2. Day 3 is setting up lesson plans, and that's so important, because if the signing authority after completing the program has to go back to their organization, they're eligible to be a signing authority, but if their organization doesn't or is not yet enrolled in the DCP Program, they can assist the company by basically going through and creating the lesson plans and submitting to the MTO. So that's a big part of that. So, again, the signing authority has that knowledge leaving the program.

Ken Rayner:

Right.

Brad Bird:

Day 4: coaching. It's great to be out there and show somebody how to do it, but what happens if they're struggling? How do I take somebody and coach them in a positive way so that they can learn? Because let's face it, when you're teaching a skill, such as getting a classified driver's license, and many companies are still using trucks that are standard, not automatics. So I'm teaching somebody to properly use a clutch. I'm teaching somebody how to properly shift a non-synchro transmission, those types of things. It can be frustrating for the individual trying to learn. How do I coach them? So, again, that's a big part of it.

Day 5, we get into coaching. A little more coaching, but then how do I evaluate that they've got it? Because a big part of training...it's not just delivering content, as I mentioned earlier. At the end of it, how do I evaluate to know that the person actually has that knowledge to be successful?

Day 6. So we get into Week 2 and we get into Day 6, which is facilitation. Adults learn differently than children. A lot of the time, we can use content but have it come from the adults in the training program. So it's a different way of teaching adults. Most people aren't comfortable with facilitation. So we spend a lot of time on that on Day 6.

Day 7 we look at proper presentation and instruction. How do I deliver presentations and instructions?

Day 8 is facilitating learning. Day 9 is assessment and documentation. A big part of that is, especially with the MTO system, how do I properly assess? I need to take my trainer hat off at this point in time and put my evaluator hat on—and how do I do this in a non-judgmental way? So what I really like about our fleet program is that we look at the MTO standards for testing, but again, we can use the same standard if I'm evaluating a driver for a job, as an example.

So this *Fleet Signing Authority* program is great for somebody that's going to be a signing authority, but it's great professional development for others that may not want signing authority as well. And then, Day 10 continues on into assessment and documentation. So that is our ten-day fleet program, Ken.

Ken Rayner:

Wow. And just out of curiosity, Brad, in all your years of teaching and instructing, how many times would you have gone through and taught or facilitated our *Fleet Signing Authority* program?

Brad Bird:

It's interesting. We chatted a little bit before we started the podcast, and I had to really think back. I started with safe workplace associations in April of 1999. So I guess I'm in my 26th year here at IHSA, and I think I've probably ran at-minimum two a year. So I'm going to say I am probably in around the 50-programs mark of delivering the *Fleet Signing Authority* program.

Ken Rayner:

Wow. And then it's a two-week program, so you're up over 100 weeks. So basically, almost two years of teaching this class.

Brad Bird:

Absolutely.

Ken Rayner:

When you lay it all out. Wow. Okay. So we definitely have the right person here talking about this topic today. That's amazing, Brad. How does someone's taking *IHSA's Fleet Signing Authority* and their taking it from IHSA—how are they able to help companies gain the competencies to train, test, and

recommend their employees for license upgrades? So, now they've taken it, now they're going back to their organization. How does that all work, Brad?

Brad Bird:

Well, they've taken the *Fleet Signing Authority* program, and if you have an organization that has an existing Driver Certification Program, they're already registered with the MTO, it's a fairly simple process. They take their certificate back, their RAO, if we remember back, the Registered Authority Official within that organization would then apply to the MTO to have that person registered as a Signing Authority under that company. So that's fairly common because if I look at school bus companies as an example, they may have 15 or 20 signing authorities, because they may have many different divisions. So that person now would have their name registered as a signing authority for that company, and they would have that in a process. Now that person can start using the training program that was supplied to the MTO from that organization. They can start using that training program, training people and upgrading their driver's licenses.

If it's somebody that's completed the program and they're working for an organization that has not yet applied under the Driver Certification Program to have a registered authority, they would then start the process with senior management, "Who is going to be our RAO? Who is going to apply? Who is going to sign the contract?" An assigning authority then would use their training to develop that training program and submit it to the MTO. And once that training program is submitted to the MTO and it meets the MTO standards, they would then be approved and then they could start using that certification program to train and upgrade their drivers.

Ken Rayner:

All right. We talked about this a little bit, Brad, I know you've touched on it, but let's make sure that we've covered it all here. What type of companies should give consideration to participating in the Driver Certification Program? I know you talked about one with large fleets. What would you say are the type of companies that should be... If they're listening to this podcast today, which of the companies should be looking into this a little bit more?

Brad Bird:

Absolutely, Ken. So agreed, 100 per cent, large fleets would be something that I would certainly consider. I see it all the time and I hear how hard it is to recruit drivers. They say recruiting drivers or driver shortage is something that's been around, and I've heard this same concern probably for 25-plus years now, that we don't have enough drivers. And I agree with that but we're maybe looking in the wrong places. We're looking to have people walk through a door.

If I had many people in my organization and they wanted to be successful someplace else within my organization, maybe driving a piece of equipment and needing that commercial driver's license is something that would be good for them to have. I think that's fantastic. Municipalities, boy oh boy, I see this all the time because municipalities will have their public works. So the folks that maybe operate their larger pieces of equipment that might be for the sign work, like changing street lights, it could be road maintenance, plows, so on and so forth.

And then we have our parks and rec crews, where those folks primarily need a G license. But in wintertime, when we're looking at snow removal, boy, it'd be nice to have a few extra plow operators. Well, there you go. You've got those folks in the parks and rec. We upgrade them. Now they've got their D license and we're not mowing a whole lot of grass in the wintertime. Now we can take those folks and, again, help us to run our organization because now they have the proper class of license to be able to run those trucks.

Construction is another big area. There's so many things that happen on a construction site, and there's so many people that might say, "Yeah, I'd like to move up within my organization but how do I do that?" Having that classified license to be able to do that is another way to assist them and the organization, again, to ensure that we give folks the opportunity to upgrade their driver's license. The organization will have a more skilled and diverse workforce as well.

Ken Rayner:

Right on. So, really, all the sectors that we support—because utilities have large fleets as well—really have an opportunity to look at this program and see how it can benefit their organization, right?

Brad Bird:

Oh, for sure. Absolutely. All the sectors that we support could use this. And I would suggest that many of them really take a serious look at it. I really and truly think that sometimes we're missing out on good people, because we're looking outside of our own doorway to try and bring drivers in with a classified license. If we bring people in and basically have them work through our system within our organization, a lot of times, those are good people that we already have and we can put them in the seat of a vehicle and fill that spot.

Ken Rayner:

Brad, I want to ask you something because I think you touched on this in one of your other responses, but if a company is not part of the Ministry of Transportation's Driver Certification Program as of today, is there still a benefit to sending their driver trainers or their fleet safety professionals to take IHSA's 10-day *Fleet Signing Authority - MTO Driver Certification Program*? Is there a benefit?

Brad Bird:

For sure. It's interesting—I was at one of our Fleet Safety Council's presentations a couple of years ago, and the insurance organizations were there. They were talking about how to be compliant, how to make sure that companies today not only stay compliant but try and have a good fleet of drivers, making sure that we're doing all the right things. And what I heard over and over and over again is driver evaluations. Somebody will walk through the door of a trucking company and say, "You're looking for drivers. I have an A license. I'll work for you." Well, what kind of an evaluation does the company do? And one of the things that we often find is we don't have people trained in those organizations to do an evaluation properly.

So the *Fleet Signing Authority* program definitely covers that off. So when I look at things like professional development, these folks may have drivers that have many years of safe driving, many

kilometres of safe driving, but they really haven't had any training on how to train somebody else or evaluate another driver, whether it's a co-driver or whether it's somebody new coming through the door that may work for that company.

So the company will just send that individual with a senior driver and say, "What do you think?" And it's really down to the person sitting in the passenger's seat that they get butterflies, but do we grade them? So again, the *Fleet Signing Authority* program is going to talk a lot about evaluation, and if we do decide to take that driver after we evaluated, because we actually scored them and found out that they're worthy of keeping, now, how do I coach them and make sure that they drive in a manner that we want to keep that driver as well? So all those things are talked about in the *Fleet Signing Authority* program, and I think really and truly that that is something that's worthwhile for anybody for professional development, not just somebody that's looking for signing authority.

Ken Rayner:

Yeah, great. Sold me on it, Brad. It is. And just in terms of importing that risk, you're bringing somebody new on board. Yes, they have a license, but you don't know their experience, you don't know their history, or don't know how they drive. Great to have somebody from your company there that you can trust and rely on to evaluate that person and understand, do they need some areas of improvement? And if they do, then providing them that guidance and help. So that's fantastic. Love that tip.

Brad, what happens if someone's listening to this and goes, "Hey, this sounds like a really great idea"? How can they learn more about this program? What would you suggest, Brad?

Brad Bird:

Well, I guess number one, they can listen to the podcast. So once they listen to the podcast, hopefully they'll learn a bit about it. The MTO actually has a really good information docket, if you will, on their site. IHSA does have on our training list on our website a lot about our *Fleet Signing Authority* program, our *Air Brake Instructor* program, as well as our recertification program. So they can do that. They can call into customer service, and customer service can have that person connect with one of our transportation subject matter experts. They can speak to one of us and we'd be happy to give them more information as well.

Ken Rayner:

Perfect. Perfect, Brad. So what I'll do is I will make sure those links are posted on the podcast channel. So if anybody is looking to access either the MTO link or the ones from the IHSA, we'll make sure those are all up there. All right?

Brad Bird:

Absolutely.

Ken Rayner:

Fantastic. Brad, thank you very much for sharing information on the MTO Driver Certification Program. Very helpful. Really appreciate doing this with you, so thanks for joining us on the *IHSA Safety Podcast*.

Brad Bird:

You're most welcome, Ken. And one of the things I pride myself on at IHSA is not just being here to deliver training, but rather it's great training, and I think the *Fleet Signing Authority* program and *our Air Brake Instructor* program, it's there to try and make our roads safer in Ontario. It's not just about having someone be successful in a program, it's actually taking that facilitator to the next level, so that they can make sure that the people leading their organizations have that level of competence on the road. And we all have families travelling on the road, so it's nice to see those professional drivers being trained out there.

Ken Rayner:

Great. Excellent parting thoughts. Thanks so much, Brad. And thanks very much to the listeners for listening to the *IHSA Safety Podcast* and our episode on Ontario Ministry of Transportation's Driver Certification Program. Be sure to subscribe and "like" us on your podcast channel, and visit us at ihsa.ca for a wealth of health and safety resources and information.

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