



Announcer:

It is 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're joined by IHSA's Maren Gamble to discuss preventative action versus corrective action. Welcome back to the podcast, Maren.

Maren Gamble:

Thanks, Ken. I'm excited to be back.

Ken Rayner:

Glad to have you back and talking about corrective versus preventive action. So, why are we talking about this, Maren?

Maren Gamble:

That is a fabulous question. As with many of our podcasts that you and I have recorded this year, this is another podcast where we look at the distinction between two concepts in health and safety that are often confused. In the past, we recorded one about hazards versus risks. Again, something where we're looking at how you define things and how you can use those definitions to help build a system, even if your front-line staff never have to worry about the distinction between the words. Corrective and preventative actions are really the same thing. It's not about the words themselves. It's not about making sure that everyone out there in the field is using and knowing exactly the correct terms, rather, it's about leveraging those definitions when you're building up the processes behind the scenes. In fact, in the case of corrective and preventative actions, your front-line staff will usually come up with, in their day-to-day interactions, almost entirely corrective actions. The preventative actions will usually come into play behind the scenes.

What do I mean by that? When we talk about corrective actions, we're really talking about actions that we're taking in reaction to something that already exists—an existing hazard or risk in the workplace. For example, if I were to do a site inspection and identify that there's a hazard in place, a corrective action for that is going to react to that specific condition that's been identified. So, if I spot a slick patch where there's some ice on the site and I throw down some salt and sand, that's a corrective action that I might take to address it. Similarly, if an incident occurs on your site and there's a hazard that's determined to be the root cause, then this is the specific condition that you're going to correct in that case. Another example of where these things come up, because they come up all throughout our system, is actually conducting an audit. So, if you are a firm that does go through an audit process and you're identifying deficiencies through that process, then you also are able to react to those identified deficiencies and make corrective

actions for those specific circumstances. So that's corrective actions. And then what else is left?

This is often where the confusion comes in. We've taken actions to fix what went wrong, so what else can we do? And this is where taking a look at the distinction for preventative actions gives you that extra boost to what your system can do and really takes it to a more advanced and effective level, because the preventative action is now going to take a proactive approach. So, once we've got the correction in place for whatever we identified out there in the field, we can take a step back and say, "Why did that even occur in the first place, and are there things that we can actually do and build into our system to stop that situation from even existing in the first place?" We're going to erase the condition from the list of possibilities in our worksite. So if we were to look at the ice scenario, now that we've addressed it on the one site, is there a way to look at trying to minimize or eliminate the same icy condition across all of our sites? How are we going to address that?

Ken Rayner:

Maren, you brought up a couple of examples, including addressing the ice, and on other podcasts we've done, you've gone into some really in-depth examples of how this applies in the real world. Could we get into that? Do you have any more real life examples of what corrective action may look like versus preventative actions so that people can really understand it at their workplace?

Maren Gamble:

Absolutely. You know I'm just full of examples, Ken. One of the common examples that's used with corrective and preventative action is the idea of a fire. Every once in a while there's a fire that may break out, and a corrective action for a fire is quite literally putting out the fire. You're reacting to a situation that happens. Anytime a fire breaks out, you're going to take the steps necessary to try and eliminate the fire. But preventative actions strengthen your position, so that you're not running from fire to fire to fire indefinitely. You're actually taking a step back and saying, "Well, what are the causes of these fires, and can we eliminate the source of the fire breaking out in the first place, so we don't have to keep putting fires out and taking corrective actions? Can we actually take a preventative action that eliminates that need altogether?"

That's one of the more common examples, in terms of something very overt and sudden. I also like to, when we talk, Ken, think about something that has nothing to do with construction or transportation specifically and take it out to a bit more of a generic sense.

Ken Rayner:

Oh, I do too. It's either boat rides, baking, or all kinds of different things that we use as examples. So I'm excited to hear. What do you got for us today, Maren?

Maren Gamble:

The number of hobbies I have to take up to keep giving podcast examples. In this case, let's say I was coming to work, and I missed the bus. I wanted to take the bus to work. I missed the one I was supposed to get on, and now I'm going to be late. This is something that I wanted to avoid. There's a condition that I'm not thrilled about that's happening now. Let's say I was coming in for a meeting with you, Ken, and

now I'm going to be late for this meeting. The immediate actions that I'm going to take to correct this mistake that I've sort of gotten myself into are: I'm going to call you, Ken, to let you know I'm running late, so you're not wondering where I am. Maybe I'm going to catch the next bus and get there as soon as I can. Maybe I'm taking an alternate mode of transportation that'll get me there faster. Maybe I'm calling a cab this one time because I'm worried about being late. I'm effectively dealing with the fact that I missed my bus this morning. But maybe I'm pretty embarrassed about the fact that I showed up late for a meeting, and I want to come up with strategies that are going to prevent that from happening again. Those actions I took immediately were my corrective actions, but I can actually take preventative actions as well. Now that I've realized there's this risk of me missing this bus, I might leave earlier. I might check for system disruptions, or I might take a different mode of transportation altogether on days when I have a meeting with Ken. There'd be lots of different options to address it in the future, but it's that difference between dealing with that immediate situation and dealing with the cause in situ, right where it's existing, and actually looking at I can stop it from happening again.

Ken Rayner:

I guess the best case of preventative action is never missing your bus but believing that it's a possibility you could if you don't plan it out ahead of time and think through what could happen, what are the circumstances that could cause you to miss the bus, and how do you then manage those? Is that fair?

Maren Gamble:

Exactly. Yeah. And when we are getting into what could happen, what's going on, and what we need to avoid, it's really that idea of the root cause that we talk about in IHSA's investigation courses that are out there. Getting to that root cause, figuring out what the source of the problem was that you can most easily affect to eliminate the chain of events that happened.

Ken Rayner:

From what I'm hearing, we could say that corrective action addresses existing problems that are right in front of us, and preventative action addresses potential issues. Is one approach more critical to keeping workers healthy and safe within an occupational health and safety management system than the other?

Maren Gamble:

This is one of the things that I've come to realize as I've looked at a number of systems through my experience with the COR[®] auditing and the Health and Safety Excellence program. Really, it's important to consider both every time to maximize the efficiency of what you're doing. If you think about that fire example that I mentioned—if we only have corrective actions, we're busy putting out fires all the time. Each time there's a risk of injury, each time there's property damage. It's not a great situation. Although if we only had prevention, we perhaps wouldn't have very many fires, but imagine that one did occur because of something we didn't foresee. Now we're not putting out the fire when it does happen, which of course would allow the implications to go out of control. You'd definitely be increasing your risk of injury, increasing your property damage, and you're increasing all of your implications.

By using both perspectives, by addressing the means and the condition when it occurs and then actually preventing the condition again from occurring, we're maximizing that efficiency. And that's where the

systematic approach comes in. So, again, this is the idea of building it into your system from a process perspective, not necessarily worrying about people in the field being able to talk about the difference between corrective and preventative actions, but from a system builder perspective, making sure that both of those viewpoints are considered during your process.

Ken Rayner:

Okay, so let me throw this one at you. In a high performing occupational health and safety management system, what percentage would you hope that there is preventative action taking place versus corrective action? Because I'm believing that you're going to still have corrective action. Fires are still going to happen regardless of the amount of preventative action you put in. If they're going to occur from time to time, most likely most systems aren't going to foresee every circumstance happening. So there's going to be some. What would be that split between preventative action and corrective action in a well-performing system?

Maren Gamble:

In a well-performing system, both are considered every time, and that's the honest truth of it, considering systematically what you can do. That just represents taking an honest look at what I need to do to fix the situation as it exists, and asking what was the root cause and can it be corrected? So, you're going to get different answers when you actually do that analysis, but it's essentially important that it be one-to-one and both are fundamentally represented each time. And as it comes with a lot of our podcast conversations about defining these words and using that to define how you build your system, I really suggest that the system builders and administrators that are out there use the difference between these two concepts to strengthen their internal processes. So, for those who are tasked with determining those corrective and preventative actions for incidents, inspections, audits, just ensure that both of those two perspectives are included in your process specifically. I find that having two prompts in your records works infinitely better than having one.

For example, on an investigation form, it's a classic situation to say, "Okay, there's a question there or a section that says, 'Identify all your corrective and preventative actions,'" and I've seen a number of these filled out through my auditing days. The focus is always—and this is completely reasonable—on the corrective actions. How do we fix what's immediately going on in the situation? Oftentimes, preventative action just falls to the side, because there's a lot of corrective actions, essentially. So what else do we need to do? But it is critical to take that extra step, in order to actually have a program of continual improvement to say, "Could we have prevented this, now that we know it's a possibility? Maybe we didn't know it was a possibility before, but now that we know, what happens to prevent it?"

If they're actually listed as separate items—so first you're considering your corrective actions and then separately you're considering preventative actions—it forces that separate consideration into the process. The corrective actions may be done primarily by your field staff. Often they are. They're done immediately. They're securing the scene and they're taking care of whatever needs to happen. The preventative actions might be after that report goes back to the system builder, the administrator, and the people behind the scenes who are taking a systemic view from it. You might be sending it back to the owner of the company or the project manager. People who have a more overall, systematic view

might do that extra step. So it may not even be the same person determining corrective and preventative actions in each case.

Ken Rayner:

Right on. You know what, Maren? One thing that has just come to mind: when we were preparing for this podcast, I was, at least, titling it, "Preventative Action Versus Corrective Action." And from what you just said, I'm thinking that we're going to have to change the title to "Corrective Action and Preventative Action," because it's not one versus the other; it's them working together. That's what I'm hearing you say. Is that fair?

Maren Gamble:

I love that. That makes a ton of sense, Ken. Yeah.

Ken Rayner:

All right, I'm glad I'm making sense for once today. That's good. All right. And it sort of seems like you really don't have one without the other because if you're relying mostly on preventative action, as we said, realistically there's going to be corrective action that comes up. So you're going to have to do both. And if you're not doing preventative action, then be prepared to do a whole host of corrective action, most likely.

Maren Gamble:

Exactly.

Ken Rayner:

The two have to coincide together. Okay, Maren, that being said, how about looking at corrective action and preventative action and how they fit within the hierarchy of controls and that approach to addressing hazards?

Maren Gamble:

Very good point, Ken, because corrective and preventative actions that are being taken are really just different flavours of controls. Each corrective or preventative action should be determined considering the hierarchy of controls. Can our correction eliminate the hazard in response to a specific occurrence that's gone on? Can our preventative action eliminate the hazard? Elimination is always our first choice, as opposed to just putting up a barrier or adding PPE, for example. If not, we go through the hierarchy. If we can't eliminate, can we substitute? Are there administrative controls? Are there engineering controls? There's an entire hierarchy of controls that you can go through.

I've recommended on other podcasts that we've done, and I can't recommend it enough: we have a video on the IHSa YouTube page that goes through the hierarchy of controls and explains how it works. So, I always recommend the people listening to our podcast to go check that out as well. It's funny that corrective and preventative actions are often thought of as this completely separate thing from the idea of controls. You'd almost never see them used in the same context but they really are the same thing.

It's just different approaches and different contexts that you're using them. So, it is important to use all those fun things that you and I talked about on our podcast where we talked about controls and apply them when you're deciding on corrective and preventative actions as well.

Ken Rayner:

That's interesting. Talking about root cause analysis brings to mind a story that I heard about utility strikes and about two different companies that had utility strikes working for a buyer. The buyer talked to both of them about what took place, and one person said, "Well, we fired the person that did it." Okay. And the second one said, "Well, we conducted a formal incident investigation. We were able to determine root cause, and because of root cause and determining that we were able to implement some changes and then retrain people in terms of the way we were doing it, and we were able to get everybody on board. And we believe that it's been addressed from a system perspective." Two completely different things when it comes to addressing the corrective action. So really glad that you're really emphasizing that, getting to that root cause and understanding what the nature of the issue is and then getting it corrected once and for all within the system. Right?

Maren Gamble:

That's exactly it. And that example you're using is not an uncommon situation in terms of what I've seen represented. So, those root-cause corrective and preventative actions, that's where it's at from a system perspective. That's where you're actually going to see progress and see value for the effort you're putting in.

Ken Rayner:

Excellent. And Maren, you've changed my mindset in terms of understanding that it's not a competition between preventative and corrective action. It's them working together in tandem. Is there anything else that you wanted to discuss or add in regards to preventative and corrective actions?

Maren Gamble:

I can never resist adding one more thing, Ken. So yes, I have one more thing to say. A common thing that I've observed in my time as a COR[®] auditor and through the Health and Safety Excellence program is that in a lot of inspections, investigations, and audits, when corrective and preventative actions are being identified, even if they're done really, really solidly according to a system—the example you just used where a system approach is used and it's a root cause addressed, and these great ideas are come up with, often when we implement them in these applications, we're really just identifying what we're going to do and maybe confirming that we launched it in the workplace. And if you think back to our "Plan, Do, Check, Act" cycle of a couple of podcasts there, Ken, and you think about it in that context, that really stops after the "plan" and "do" stages of continual improvement.

So, we're coming up with an idea and we're attempting to implement it in the workplace, but we're never going back to check on it and make sure that it was actually effective in terms of doing what we need to do. There's a huge opportunity when we're identifying our corrective and preventative actions and then implementing them in the workplace to include, as part of our plan, when we did that plan stage and identified the actions, to also identify when we're going to check on them, how we're going to

check on them, and who's going to do it, so that we can actually look back on a plan schedule to say, "That action we took," in particular perhaps the preventative actions, which might be more ongoing, but even the corrective actions, "did they work? Did they actually achieve the goals that we were looking for? Did they address the root cause, or did they end up addressing things around the root cause but not really what we were looking for?" Because that gives us the opportunity to make changes and to actually impact what we were trying to impact.

So it's one of those areas that really provides an opportunity for a firm who's trying to develop a very full system around this sort of idea of corrective and preventative action, to think through that whole continual improvement cycle of "Plan, Do, Check, Act", take it beyond the "plan, do" and make sure you include the "check, act," to give yourself the opportunity to ensure it's working and to really protect your staff.

Ken Rayner:

Yeah, love that, Maren. I guess in particular, if change is a big part of that corrective or preventative action that's taking place, and it's something—a routine, habit, or procedure that workers have followed for a long period of time—you're implementing change. It doesn't necessarily mean that it's going to take right away, unless there's follow up and insurance to the adherence of the change. And so if you're not checking on it and if there's issues that it's not being followed as succinctly as it was expected to be, then you got to act on it, and you got to keep checking and acting until the change has taken place to the degree that it needs to. Is that fair?

Maren Gamble:

That's fair. And well said, Ken.

Ken Rayner:

Okay. All right. Well, since it was well said, what a great time to end the podcast. All right, Maren, thanks so much for this. I learned a lot and I appreciate it. And because of you and what you shared, I am going to change the name of the podcast from "Preventative Versus Corrective Action" to "Corrective Action and Preventative Action". So thank you for that. Great to have you on the podcast as always. Thank you so much, Maren.

Maren Gamble:

Thank you, Ken.

Ken Rayner:

And thank you to the listeners for listening to the *IHSA Safety Podcast* and our episode on preventative action and corrective action. 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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