



**Announcer:**

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

**Enzo Garritano:**

We're here again with Ron Kelusky, our chief prevention officer, who again is retiring at the end of September, and it's a good opportunity to have a conversation on his last three and a half years serving Ontario and serving workers in workplaces in Ontario.

Switching gears to COVID, when you think about COVID and the disruption that that caused, really it was also maybe an opportunity. Maybe I'll open that question up to you. Do you see that as an opportunity for health and safety taking more of a forward or primary, a center stage perspective in workplaces' minds?

**Ron Kelusky:**

The good news is that it raised the profile of health and safety. And then on the other side of the spectrum, the bad news is it identified some very clear weaknesses on what we had perceived where we were with health and safety, especially with smaller organizations.

When we asked people earlier on, especially essential business can you do a risk assessment to determine how to deal with where you need to apply the hierarchy of controls, what we got back was what's a risk assessment and what's the hierarchy of controls? So that, in some of the larger established organizations, it wasn't a problem, but for Ontario's smaller businesses, it was a problem, and we had to do a lot of effort, as you know, to be able to start addressing that. And it's taught us that both how we convey knowledge, in the manner of which it's conveyed, and then the priority of the information that we're providing.

I think what COVID taught us is we need a single point of entry because there were so much information out there. Public Health was putting out information, local public health was putting out information, associations were putting out information. We, as a system, were putting out information. And to the small business owner that really maybe didn't apply health and safety principles all that frequently, it became very confusing. So that was a big learning and a big takeaway from us.

I think what it also taught us was that collaboration and communication is really important. What we did collectively, whether it was with the OGCA [Ontario General Contractors Association] Safety Committee, which we met every week during COVID, and we shared information. We shared best practices. We saw the power of bringing together groups of people and actually speaking to them without fear of competition. This brought the system together quickly, and I think there was in meeting also with BILD [Building Industry and Land Development Association] and COCA [Council of Ontario Construction Associations] and OGC and RESCON [Residential Construction Council of Ontario] on a frequent basis, especially through the rapid screening trials and rolling out rapid screening, it really taught us the value of bringing together people, and that, as you had indicated so clearly, the ideas came from the bottom. The ideas I just facilitated. I didn't. There's-

**Enzo Garritano:**

Well, I was going to say though-

**Ron Kelusky:**

Not everything.

**Enzo Garritano:**

...don't undercut that. Don't undercut that because I think if you can comment even on your past experiences as the CEO of PSHSA [Public Sector Health and Safety Association], which engaged in the healthcare sector, and being with Red Cross and being with the ambulance services, how do you think your role there facilitate it? Because I think that's what everyone really wants to know because I think there was great success in that collaboration, and it was pretty smooth, even from our end, in regards to getting guidelines reviewed by public health, by yourselves at your offices. How do you think your role there and maybe your knowledge of the industries that were really relied upon during the pandemic, how do you feel that that contributed towards the success, if we want to call that the successes in getting communication out?

**Ron Kelusky:**

I think the good part was knowing the key players. One of the challenges when you move from a job or a career into another job, you lose your Rolodex. If you're established, you know yourself having spent a number of years with IHSA, you know who to call in the construction industry if you have a question. And I think that early on in COVID having had the experience of knowing yourself and our other system partners, it made it easy to mobilize.

When the Inspectorate came out and said, "Okay, parts of construction are staying open, what do we need to do," we were quickly able to make a phone call, say, "Look, no holes barred, whatever you need, go out and start offering support to the industry," whether it was through the compliance assistant teams that we did. But that was a phone call. That wasn't pondering and saying, "What am I going to do?" It was just we knew what the system was capable of doing. We knew that when we were opening the courts, we could mobilize 40 people if we needed to go around regionally and do risk assessments from a skilled area.

So knowing the players, knowing the people, and trusting the people. It was really important if you're making a phone call, whether it's to yourself, that you knew that not only would it be done, but it would be done very well. And that was-

**Enzo Garritano:**

I think that's a two-way street there too because the amount of changing information over time, especially with COVID, what was changing on a public health side, what was changing from a best practice side, PPE, the rest, was really relying on that whole system engagement from public health to the ministry, to your office at the Chief Prevention Office, to our system partners and our industry stakeholders. So I think that from our perspective at IHSA, that was pretty impressive to see that move forward as it did and to everyone to land on a single best practice and single best perspective so we can

get that communication out with confidence to the industry. I think that was a big issue that when the industry got it-

**Ron Kelusky:**

And it was really helpful too that, and we found this out during the rollout of the rapid screening program, that most other industry in the province has a corresponding ministry. So if you think about mining has Northern Development, retail manufacturing has economic development, job creation and trade. So virtually everybody, but where's construction? Construction, yes, you have Infrastructure Ontario, but that's more of a project-based system.

And it really, the importance was that our minister had a great love and affinity for the construction industry. And I always said, know where your bread's buttered. It became very evident that because of that relationship and the value that the minister placed on the industry, not only from an economic perspective, but also from what he and others are trying to do with this government, it created a huge opportunity for us in the Ministry of Labor Skills and Development, particularly in prevention, to be able to increase our profile, which was really, really important.

**Interviewer:**

And at the bottom line is making sure that all these essential services workers were getting home safe. I mean, that's all our goals at the end of the day. And I think this pandemic has taught us that, and again working collectively we can put the people in the best position to get home not only safely but healthy and through a pandemic of unknown consequences early on. That certainly was welcoming to the industry.

Now when it comes to the general public, what's your perspective in regards to the general public's understanding of respect for health and safety overall? You mentioned it earlier that it was a great opportunity to raise the profile. What do you see from all the sectors in Ontario, not just the sectors that we serve here at IHSA, being construction, training, transportation and utilities, but just throughout the province in general, what do you think has again, how has that profile risen, and what do you think is the ongoing sustainability of that profile?

**Ron Kelusky:**

Well, as you know, we're trying to look at a focus on small business because it's really the driver of the economy. It's like 80 per cent, 85 per cent of Ontario's economy. Big business gets it. They have the resources to be able to manage their health and safety very well. They're aware of it. If you look at the Business Council of Occupational Health and Safety, BCOH, which represents the top-tier employers, they really understand what it's all about. Utility understands what it's all about. Really our challenge has been the smaller businesses that don't necessarily have the frequency of injury that puts it high on their priority list. Once every seven years, they might, on average, have an injury, so they may perceive it as a cost of doing business.

The other thing that we've noticed too is that focusing more on occupation versus industry. We do know in construction, as an example, that entry level, non-skilled positions have between 25 and 45 per cent

of the injuries that are occurring. In some of the subsets of industry, like demolition and restoration, it's as high as 50 per cent of the injuries are unskilled labor.

So really looking at where we need to focus is we need to be able to, if a small retailer doesn't understand the value of health and safety, then we need to start looking at positions within small retail, like people that work in a warehouse, or for example, a young female between 18 and 24 and issues of sexual harassment, as an example, that we found through the survey, through Ipsos, that we found that there are vulnerable groups within particular industries that we need to start focusing perhaps on those occupations as well.

So it's just one size doesn't fit all. That's the other thing that we're finding is that a small roofer versus a large general contractor can't approach them in the same manner, and you know that very well. We have to start looking at what works, and it may require us to get away from it's just a standard program that everybody sits in, and we may have to start specializing to get things done.

**Enzo Garritano**

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