



Announcer

It is time for the *IHSA Safety Podcast*.

Enzo Garritano

Welcome to this podcast series on supervisors. I'm Enzo Garritano, President and CEO of IHSA. In this episode, we're joined again by host Ken Rayner, Vice President of Customer and Labor Relations Market Development and Communications here at IHSA. Ken's guest will be Bruce Christianson, Employment and Social Development Canada, or ESDC's, Ontario Regional Director for the Federal Labour Program. Please welcome Ken and Bruce.

Ken Rayner:

Thanks, Enzo Garritano. Welcome to the *IHSA Safety Podcast*, Bruce Christianson. To start, Bruce, please share with our listeners what your roles and responsibilities are at the Federal Labor Program Ontario Regional Operations and Compliance?

Bruce Christianson:

Well, thanks Ken and Enzo for inviting me today to discuss the role of supervisors in workplace health and safety. As you mentioned, I'm the Regional Director of Ontario for the Government of Canada's Labour Program. The Labour Program's mandate is to promote safe, healthy, cooperative, and productive workplaces. My main responsibility is to fulfill this mandate for the province of Ontario in the Ontario region. Our focus is on labour standards and occupational health and safety. Labour standards are part three of the *Canada Labour Code*. They cover minimum wage, working conditions and the like, and our role is to enforce these labor standards to ensure that all Canadian workers are treated fairly and paid fairly for their work. On the occupational health and safety front well, this is under part two of the Code and we enforce it to ensure that Canada's workplaces are safe and secure places to work and to do business in. This legislation and its regulations are there to ensure employees know about their rights and are protected from hazards in their workplace. It's also there to make sure that while workers know that they have a right to make a complaint about even refuse work, that they feel that poses a risk to their health and safety.

Finally, the legislation also gives employees the right to take part in making their workplaces as safe and healthy as possible. At the national level, while the Labour Program provides mediation and conciliation services to employers and unions, it ensures that employers are in compliance with labor and employment equity legislation, and it also negotiates international labor agreements. As you know, with every workplace in the world, COVID-19 in has had a significant impact on the workforce, including ours, and I just wanted to take the time to say that I'm very proud of the work that our staff has completed during these difficult times.

Ken Rayner:

Hey Bruce, I think if last time I checked federally regulated workplaces in Ontario make up about 10 per cent, somewhere around that neighborhood. So there's probably a lot of our listeners that are not really clear as to what constitutes federally regulated workplace. So the ones that come to mind for me, particularly with the membership that we support are transportation companies that will go over outside of the boundaries of Ontario. We've got telecommunications companies, you've got banks, you've got airlines, you've got rail, we've got insurance companies. So regardless of the sector when it comes to a federally regulated workplace, what attributes would you say would make up a competent supervisor in a federally regulated Ontario workplace?

Bruce Christianson:

Supervisors are responsible for making sure their employees have the tools, knowledge and supervision they need to carry out the organization's mandate. Supervisors while they also need to make sure that their employees can carry out their work while protecting their own health and safety. That said, from my perspective, a competent supervisor understands that health and safety plays a big role in how well their employees can perform. Competent supervisors are therefore committed to having robust health and safety practices as part of the tools, knowledge and provision they provide to their employees. In fact, the *Canada Labour Code* and its regulation does allow for supervisors to implement health and safety requirements into their day-to-day activities. The Code assigns supervisors specific duties so that they can show their due diligence when dealing with occupational health and safety matters. And these duties include directing or organizing the work and how it should be done, telling workers about actual or possible dangers, which involves explaining the laws that apply to them, showing workers how to work safely, which might include giving them training, written instructions or correcting how they work.

Supervisors also have the duty to respond to workers' concerns, making sure workers follow procedures and use the right equipment and in the safe way. They also need to make sure that employees work in compliance with the acts and regulations that apply to their work, making sure workers use the protective equipment or clothing that the employer requires, and finally, taking every reasonable precaution to protect workers.

Ken Rayner:

Thanks, Bruce. I think, again, one of the things that our listeners might be interested in with this is particularly those that have only worked under the provincial regulations in the past, how much alignment there is between the two. I mean, if you hadn't mentioned the *Canadian Labour Code* in that last section, some of the listeners would've said always talking about provincial regulations because they're so aligned. So that being said, what are some tasks being that the supervisor is such an important part in the workplace, what are some tasks when executed by a supervisor who does it in a competent and complete manner that can make some real significant contributions to a safe and healthy workplace?

Bruce Christianson:

Supervisors have a duty on behalf of their employer to ensure that the health and safety of every person employed by their employer is protected while they're working. And as you said, that's common

between federal and provincial legislations and supervisor's duties that I mentioned earlier all contribute to a safe and healthy workplace. Further than that, supervisors also need to create a strong safety culture in their workplace. They have to work with employees to resolve health and safety concerns. And an important way to do this is to consult with workplaces, health and safety committees or representatives. They should be consulted on all health and safety policies and programs, including programs for preventing hazards that are specific to that or their workplace. Programs to supply personal protective equipment and any changes in the workplace that could impact the health and safety of their employees. They should be consulting with the health and safety committee or representative.

Supervisors also need to arrange for regular workplace health and safety inspections. So when these inspections identify hazards or issues, they need to make sure that these issues are resolved in a timely fashion. And furthermore, when there's hazardous occurrences or accidents that occur and are reported, supervisors need to make sure there is an investigation to determine the cause and put in measures to help prevent this from happening again.

And of course, all inspections and investigations must be done in collaboration with the workplace's Health and Safety Committee or representatives. So essentially building that culture is making sure that employees are part of the process, part of the solutions in our legislation and regulations it's through the health and safety committees and representatives.

Ken Rayner:

Excellent, excellent. So we're talking about hazards. You mentioned hazards, supervisors maybe a decade ago. I think were focused primarily on physical hazards. Things have changed a lot in the past decade. Things have a lot changed, a lot obviously, in the past two years with the pandemic. What other types of hazards are supervisors expected to address today, maybe compared to 10 years ago?

Bruce Christianson:

Well, yeah, you're correct, Ken. In the past, supervisors have focused on physical hazards, and I think it's because those are more tangible, right? So it's easier to see, easier to correct. The *Canada Labour Code* and its regulations have made some improvements, some changes to this, and it now requires supervisors to deal with more intangible hazards such as harassment, violence, and psychological hazards. Protecting employees from these intangible hazards will make for workplaces that are psychologically healthy and safe as well. So supervisors play a critical role in preventing and addressing harassment, violence, and psychological hazards in the workplace. They need to be aware of the resources available in their organization to achieve this. Furthermore, as you mentioned, the current global pandemic shed light on how important it is to address invisible biological hazards such as COVID-19. In the last 22-plus months, while supervisors, all industries have had to put plans in place to prevent exposure and transmission of COVID-19, they've had to develop procedures to put in the necessary control measures in place, inform workers about these new measures, and make sure that workers comply with these procedures.

Ken Rayner:

That's a lot for an experienced supervisor to oversee and to manage on a regular basis. What about a new supervisor, Bruce? So someone that's just now coming into this world as a supervisor in a workplace. Do you have some suggestions for that new supervisor, that individual?

Bruce Christianso

Bruce Christianson:

Yeah, of course. The first thing is take advantage of all the training available to you so that you can increase your confidence and knowledge as a leader. Look for courses both within and outside your organization. These can include health and safety management, leadership skills and human resources courses, anything to help you with your confidence as a leader, and obviously health and safety being part of that as well.

Secondly, is build and maintain relationships with your employees and management team, and that these relationships are based on openness and transparency. In my mind's eye, this paves the way for collaboration with employees and it helped resolve health and safety concerns in the workplace. It also lays the foundation for a well-functioning workplace health and safety committee. So when there's good relationships, there's trust, and people feel that they can go to you as a supervisor with concerns and that they know that you'll do what needs to get done to improve while then you help yourself and you help the team to work well and safe.

Ken Rayner:

Great suggestions, Bruce. Thanks. So maybe that leads us into another question here in terms of, so whether it's a new supervisor, whether it's experienced supervisor, there's going to be times as that supervisor is in the workplace that they're going to be visited by an inspector from ESDC or a labor program, occupational health and safety labor affairs officer, right? So what would you see as the ideal interaction between an ESDC Labour Program occupational health and safety labour affairs officer, otherwise known as an inspector and a supervisor in a workplace?

Bruce Christianson:

Our inspectors are often called upon and they will interact with workplace supervisors usually in two types of situations. The first being that the inspector arrives to investigate a complaint, refusal to work a serious injury or fatality, or secondly, when the inspector arrives to make an unscheduled inspection at the workplace. So in both these cases or scenarios, an ideal interaction would be when the supervisor cooperates fully with the inspector. The inspector is simply carrying out his or her duties and powers under the part two of the *Canada Labour Code*. They are there to gather the information they need as part of their investigation or inspection to determine if there's compliance or non-compliance issues that could affect the employee's health and safety in that particular workplace. In some circumstances, the inspector will need to contact the supervisor after the initial visit to determine whether the workplace is compliant. Of course, in those situations, it's also important for the supervisor to be responsive to the inspector's, either emails and/or phone communications. Ultimately, the Labour Program, Labor Affairs Officer and the workplace supervisor have the same goal, and that's to protect the health and safety of the employees.

Ken Rayner:

I love that last part. Really, it is a common goal. Everyone's working towards that. Let's get everybody home safe at the end of each day to their loved ones. Love it. Bruce Christianso, thank you so much for joining us from ESDC. That was very helpful. Not only, I think for our listeners who are working within federally regulated workplaces in Ontario, but also for those that have decided to listen to this podcast and work within provincially regulated workplaces so they have a better understanding as to what are the rules and regulations within the federal rules. So thank you so much, Bruce. It was a pleasure.

Enzo Garritano

Thank you for listening to IHSA's series on supervisors. Join us for part two of this podcast on supervisors in federally regulated workplaces as Ken Rayner speaks with IHSA's, Doug Heintz, Manager, Health and Safety Education and Accredited Programs. Be sure to subscribe and like us on your podcast channel and visit us on ihsa.ca for a wealth of health and safety resources and information.

Announcer

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