



**Announcer**

It is time for the *IHSA Safety Podcast*.

**Enzo Garritano:**

Welcome to the *IHSA Safety Podcast*. I'm Enzo Garritano, president and CEO of IHSA. In this episode, we're joined by host Ken Rayner, Vice President of Customer and Labour Relations, Market Development and Communications, as he chats with Dean Dunn, IHSA's VP of Stakeholder and Public Relations, and Jennifer McKenzie, Regional Manager, North and East Operations, about Canada's National Construction Safety Officer™ or NCSO™ Certificate Program. Ken?

**Ken Rayner:**

Thanks, Enzo. Welcome back to the *IHSA Safety Podcast*, Jen McKenzie and Dean Dunn. I'm thrilled to have you both here today to talk about Canada's National Construction Safety Officer™ certificate program. So we may have had some listeners that have not heard you on the podcast before. So Jennifer and Dean, perhaps we can start with some introductions first. Jen, could we start with you please?

**Jennifer McKenzie:**

Absolutely. Thanks, Ken. So Jennifer McKenzie, I'm the North and East Regional Manager for our operations department here at IHSA. I oversee 12 training consultants across my half of the province and I'm also part of the NCSO™ committee.

**Dean Dunn:**

Thanks Ken. Dean Dunn, Vice President of Stakeholder and Public Relations. One of my duties is the overseeing of the Labour-Management Network here at IHSA and I'm also a member of the NCSO™ committee and I've had the pleasure of leading it for the last few years.

**Ken Rayner:**

Okay, sir. Well, since you've been leading the NCSO™ program, I want to start the first question with you. So where did the NCSO™ program originate and how did it become or why is it a national standard?

**Dean Dunn:**

It's a great question. Ken and the National Construction Safety Officer™ or NCSO™, originated with the Canadian Federation of Construction Safety Associations. In fact, the NCSO™ is a registered trademark with the Canadian Federation. IHSA, along with 10 other construction or safety associations are members that participate in the NCSO™ program. This membership covers seven provinces and three territories across Canada, with the exception of Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Quebec.

The National Construction Safety Officer™ program verifies that a person has met the training practical applications, years of experience, and written performance measurements standards that are set out by the Canadian Federation of Construction Safety Associations. After July 1, 2017, the national standards allows for those that have been granted NCSO™ status in one province to transfer the qualifications to another. What this means is that a person who has been granted NCSO™ status in one jurisdiction can make an application to challenge the provincial or territorial examination of another jurisdiction.

As of July 2017, the national examination only has to be successfully written once. The objective of the National Construction Safety Officer Program™ is to provide verification of a nationally recognized level of competency in relation to construction safety. The NCSO™ program demonstrates proof in practical training, knowledge in the various construction safety management skills and principles.

**Ken Rayner:**

So the Federation of Construction Safety Associations in Canada obviously felt there was a need for this program. So why was this program created, Dean, and how does it really contribute to safer workplaces in Ontario?

**Dean Dunn:**

That's another really interesting question and really it's a two-part process. So first what happened is IHSA brought COR® into Ontario. That was back in 2012. In a very short period of time, with the increasing number of companies realizing the benefits of COR®, its program, it became apparent that companies adopting COR® were looking for a higher standard in safety professionals to help guide them through this process. The next step was the introduction of the NCSO™ program. It was a natural fit at that time when we introduced COR®, IHSA was supporting the construction health and safety officer program.

Unfortunately, this program did not have a knowledge verification component, or any practical experience requirement and was only recognized in the province of Ontario. So the NCSO™ program is more in-depth, it had greater offerings and was recognized nationally. So it was determined that the IHSA, as a member of the Canadian Federation of Construction Safety Associations, would adopt the principles of the NCSO™.

**Ken Rayner:**

So IHSA, Dean, has well over a hundred different courses that we offer. What was the rationale for selecting the particular courses that you did for the National Construction Safety Officer certificate program?

**Dean Dunn:**

This was actually a collaboration, Ken. What it was is all the participating members of the NCSO™ program, they sat down and discussed what do you want to see in a National Construction safety officer? What skills, what practical experiences, what would they need in order to keep workers on a construction project healthy and safe?

So they developed a list of the training topics and that list would compile of, in this particular case, let's start with a general compulsory elements, a health and safety program and its content, investigations and reporting, training and communication, legislation and its responsibilities, supervisor training, emergency preparedness, first aid, hazard identification analysis, and what controls to use, inspections, records and statistics auditing.

And then we thought about, "Well, what do we need specific for construction?" And then we were looking at, "All right, WHMIS," preventative maintenance for all the equipment that's on a construction project, occupational health, hygiene, safe work practices and procedures, personal protective equipment, site safety and housekeeping. And then discussion revolved around the practical application and the members agreed that what they wanted to ensure were the NCSOs™ could actually give proof that they had the knowledge when it came to hazard identification and control, communication exercises, safety programs, and audits. In all, I think it's a very well-rounded list of competencies that we would like to see in the NCSO™ to keep workers safe.

**Ken Rayner:**

So for an employer who perhaps needs a competent health and safety resource and they're considering an NCSO™ and hiring one, it sounds to me like not only you've rounded it out real nicely with all the different components of training. Those training courses require successful completion, so they've got to successfully complete that course. It's not just to sit there and attend, they've got to complete it, and then they've got to write an exam as well. So there's a lot of verification, not just training courses that someone's taken. It's that verification that they understand the content and then altogether in a national program, writing it as an exam.

**Dean Dunn:**

One hundred percent agreed, Ken, it's the practical exam, then it's the simulated hazard analysis, and then to top it all off, it's actually a national exam for health and safety practices that are recognized across the country.

**Ken Rayner:**

Right on. Excellent. Okay, Jennifer, and we're going to start getting you involved here. So Jen, let's talk about the process. Now, Dean's created hopefully some interest in with our listeners in terms of the NCSO™ program. Now someone's interested in finding out more. What's the process for becoming an NCSO™?

**Jennifer McKenzie:**

Thanks, Ken. That's a great question. So as Dean explained, the NCSO™ or National Construction Safety Officer is a national standard and it requires the applicant to demonstrate a level of knowledge, training and experience, and therefore we have a few different parts here.

So to get started, an applicant should review the NCSO™ reference guide available at [IHSA.ca](http://IHSA.ca) underneath the NCSO™ icon on the main page. The NCSO™ webpage will provide the applicants with many resources as well, including the frequently asked questions, checklists, and the application links.

After reviewing the NCSO™ reference guide, the next step is to complete the 11 required training programs. These programs include IHSA's *Basic Auditing Principles*, *Basics of Supervising*, *Joint Health and Safety Committee - Part 1*, *Joint Health and Safety Committee - Part 2 (Construction)*, *COR® Essentials*, *COR® Internal Auditor*, *Defensive Driving – G Class Driver*, *Introduction to Hazard and Risk Management*, *WHMIS 2015*, and *Working at Heights*.

In addition, they will also need to complete Standard First Aid and CPR by a WSIB-approved provider. The MLTSD or the Ministry of Labour, Training, and Skills Development approves providers for Working at Heights and Joint Health Safety Committee – Part 1 training programs, and therefore the IHSA will allow these programs to be taken through an approved training provider. However, as the NCSO™ must have specific knowledge and training in specific construction hazard identification areas, IHSA's *Joint Health and Safety Committee – Part 2* program, which covers the top 10 hazards identified in construction, must be taken to meet the training requirements of the standard. Also, all training with an expiry date. For example, *Working at Heights*, *Joint Health Safety Committee* certification, and *First Aid* needs to be valid for a minimum of six months from the date of the application. As a note, we would also recommend applicants keep all their training material like their participant workbooks for future use when preparing for the exams.

**Ken Rayner:**

Jen, can I ask you a question then? It's been a long time since I've been in university. I was using a typewriter to tape up most of my papers, so that gives it away. You're talking about participant workbooks, some of these courses are offered online. What would you suggest to somebody who's taking the course online in terms of preparing for that exam? Are they able to get a participant workbook?

**Jennifer McKenzie:**

That's a great question, Ken. So when you are taking one of our eLearning programs, for example, our core suite of courses, you do want to make sure that you are paying attention, taking notes and utilizing those notes. However, in the event that you are looking for a participant workbook or additional information, you can contact our NCSO™ administrator at [NCSOadministrator@IHSA.ca](mailto:NCSOadministrator@IHSA.ca) and request the participant workbook for this specific course

**Ken Rayner:**

And that email address again, Jen was NCSO™?

**Jennifer McKenzie:**

[ncsoadministrator@ihsa.ca](mailto:ncsoadministrator@ihsa.ca).

**Ken Rayner:**

So Jen, what about the rest of the process?

**Jennifer McKenzie:**

So the next process is in regards to your experience. So for the experience, an individual must show that they have maintained a minimum of three years of practical construction experience within the last 10 years of employment. Practical experience consists of an individual who has been directly involved with on-site construction activities. We also refer to this sometimes as boots on the ground experience.

Unfortunately, the percentage of time spent completing administrative duties would not be accepted as practical experience. Therefore, the applicant's resume will need to be outlined with the construction projects and the percentage of time they were actively engaged in on-site construction activities. In addition to the resume, the applicant would also be required to submit a verification letter from either a direct supervisor, manager, trade union representative, their current employer or company owner verifying their construction experience.

Once the experience has been obtained, an applicant can then look at completing the electronic NCSO™ application form that you can find again on our website, IHSA.ca. Unfortunately, we no longer accept the mailed-in applications. The application must have all required sections completed and required documentation uploaded. The documentation includes the applicant's resume, verification letter, and training certificates. In addition, the application will require the applicant to review and agree to a code of ethics.

Once all sections are complete, the application has been submitted, the applicant will receive a confirmation email from the NCSO™ administrator letting them know that we have received their application and they will be in contact to obtain the application fee. As part of the application process, all initial NCSO™ applications will be reviewed by the NCSO™ administrator. The administrator will review and approve or reject applications based on the documents received. Those who submit incomplete applications will be notified through email, will be requested to submit any missing documentation. Those applications approved by the administrator will then be forwarded to the review committee for a final decision. The review committee does meet regularly and reviews all applications. Once an application has been approved, the NCSO™ administrator will contact the applicant to schedule the writing of the national and Provincial exams.

**Ken Rayner:**

Jennifer, what is involved with taking the provincial and national exams?

**Jennifer McKenzie:**

So getting into the exams, applicants can visit the IHSA.ca, again, the NCSO™ webpage for access to the NCSO™ Exam Study Guide. As noted earlier, NCSOs should utilize their participant workbooks from the required training programs to also assist them in their exam prep. The national examination is pulled from a pool of questions that were created in a collaborative effort with the CFCSA members participating in the NCSO™, and is based on health and safety concepts recognized across the country. The provincial exam has been created by IHSA, and all questions will be based on the information taught in all the required courses under the NCSO™ certificate. The provincial exam consists of multiple choice questions and a simulated workplace assessment. Applicants must achieve a minimum of 75 per cent on both exams in order to receive NCSO™ status.

**Ken Rayner:**

Can you please explain the renewal requirements for the NCSO™ program?

**Jennifer McKenzie:**

Once an NCSO™ does receive status, they will be required every three years to complete a renewal application. Part of the NCSO™ certificate involves a maintenance program. This is intended to demonstrate that the NCSO™ is not only qualified, but also maintains a continuous process of professional development. The maintenance program consists of two components, renewal of the required certifications that have an expiry date. So for example, *Working at Heights*, *Joint Health Safety Committee* certification, and *Standard First Aid*.

In addition, they will also need to complete ongoing professional development courses. The ongoing professional development must be demonstrated beyond the required courses of the NCSO™. A total of 18 hours must be completed within the three years, and any number of safety-related courses can be taken as long as the time completed amounts to the 18 hours.

It is important to know that while many safety courses can be taken, you cannot retake any previously completed training courses. Courses must be taken within three years of receiving the NCSO™ certificate or your last renewal. These courses must also align with the competencies set out by the other courses in the NCSO™ certificate or enhance the NCSO's working skills.

To satisfy the maintenance requirements, an application form must be submitted along with the maintenance fee and both of the following, a course outline, providing details on the course curriculum, length of the course, and objectives of the professional development program, and proof of completion of the course, including the date instructor and location. Generally, a record of training will suffice.

All courses submitted for the maintenance component will be subject to approval and verification by the committee. As you are moving through the process, please ensure you review and utilize all the resources to you at [ihsa.ca](http://ihsa.ca). There are many resources and guides that have been created to assist applicants with the process and provide you answers to many of your frequently asked questions.

**Ken Rayner:**

Wow, Jen, that was an unbelievably comprehensive answer. Thank you so much. I feel bad asking you a follow-up question, so I'm not going to. I'm going to move into something I understand has happened recently. So, Dean, yourself, and other IHSA resources recently conducted a survey of the NCSO community. What was the purpose of that outreach, Jen?

**Jennifer McKenzie:**

So, yes, in late 2021, we did complete a survey of the existing NCSOs in Ontario, and this was really to gauge their satisfaction with the NCSO™ program and to identify any areas for improvement. We're always looking for ways to improve and bring added value to our stakeholders, our members, and of course our NCSOs.

**Ken Rayner:**

Jen, what insight did you get from the survey results? What did they provide to you?

**Jennifer McKenzie:**

So we did receive nearly 200 responses that indicated a high overall level of satisfaction with the NCSO™ program. However, it was noted that there were four areas in which IHSA could increase our value to the NCSO™ membership. These areas included creating NCSO™ conferences to boost professional development, increase awareness of the value that NCSOs bring to the construction workplaces and job sites, providing updates to the NCSOs to keep them better informed of industry news and trends, and create NCSO™-branded accessories to raise the profile of the NCSO.

**Ken Rayner:**

That's terrific. Sounds like you've received a lot of clarity on other elements the NCSO™ community would like included in the program moving forward. Dean, I'm going to ask you maybe to bring us home, can you remind our listeners, we've covered a lot of topics, there's been a lot of information provided. People can go back and listen to this podcast a couple of times if they really need to understand the process a little bit more, or they can probably go to our website and find out some more information. So what would you recommend for anybody that's listening that's interested in learning more about the NCSO™ certificate program?

**Dean Dunn:**

Yeah, thanks, Ken. I would recommend that there are basically two roads we can look at here. The first one would be to go to [ihsa.ca](http://ihsa.ca) and then locate the NCSO™ tab. Click on that. There are numerous documents posted there that'll help guide you through the process. There's a frequently asked question. There's an actual NCSO™ guide. I mean, I would strongly suggest you go there first, but if you had any real specific questions, I would go [ncsoadministrator@ihsa.ca](mailto:ncsoadministrator@ihsa.ca), ask the administrator the questions, and then what they will do is they will actually broadcast it around to make sure that they get the right answer in a timely manner.

**Ken Rayner:**

Dean Dunn, Jen McKenzie, thank you so much for joining us today on the *IHSA Safety Podcast* to talk about Canada's National Construction Safety Officer program. Thank you so much.

**Dean Dunn:**

Thank you for having us.

**Jennifer McKenzie:**

Thanks, Ken.

**Enzo Garritano:**

Thank you for listening to the *IHSA Safety Podcast* on the National Construction Safety Officer. Be sure to subscribe and like us on your podcast channel, or visit us at [IHSA.ca](http://IHSA.ca) for a wealth of health and safety resources and information.

**Announcer**

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Thanks for listening.