



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 today's episode, host Ken Rayner speaks with Dr. Chris McLeod, Associate Professor with the University of British Columbia's School of Population and Public Health, along with IHSA's VP of Programs and Strategic Development, Paul Casey, as they discuss the recent research results on the impact of IHSA's COR® certification on injury rates in Ontario. Ken, over to you.

Ken Rayner:

Thanks, Enzo. Welcome to the *IHSA Safety Podcast*, Dr. Chris McLeod.

Dr. Chris McLeod:

Oh, great. Glad to be here.

Ken Rayner:

And welcome back to the podcast, Mr. Paul Casey.

Paul Casey:

Thanks for having me again.

Ken Rayner:

Great to have you both here, as we discuss the research that was recently conducted on the Certificate of Recognition or COR® certification in Ontario.

So, Dr. McLeod, we're going to start with you. When and how did your research into occupational health and safety management systems begin?

Dr. Chris McLeod:

Yeah, thanks for the question. I mean, I've had a longstanding interest in how to improve health and safety, particularly in construction, but elsewhere as well. And I got into researching this a little over a decade ago. As I think some of your listeners may know, the COR® program is a national program and has been around in Western Canada for quite some time. And I mean, even at that time 10 years ago, it actually had been in Alberta and B.C. [British Columbia] for over a decade. And it hadn't been evaluated and as a consequence, there were real concerns over whether or not it was making a difference. To the extent that I think there were some concerns around whether the program was sustainable.

And so, we worked with WorkSafeBC, but many of the other health and safety associations that use COR® in British Columbia to evaluate it, and that's really where we first saw the initial effectiveness in British Columbia overall, but also at a number of industries. And since then, we've done multiple evaluations, but also refining the evaluation approach and looking at various aspects of COR®, in terms of really understanding under what conditions is it most effective? And how in some cases it can be approved. And to this day, and I think we've now done research in four different provinces in Canada.

Ken Rayner:

Terrific. Paul, how about yourself? What prompted the Infrastructure Health and Safety Association to engage with UBC and Dr. Chris McLeod?

Paul Casey:

Thanks, Ken. The work that Dr. McLeod has done has been with some of our other members of the Canadian Federation of Construction Safety Associations. And while IHSA has been confident when we brought COR® to Ontario more than a decade ago, it was important to have data in Ontario showing that firms that achieve COR® certification actually do improve their practices, which leads to improved performance. And that was the motivation here.

The other piece of it is that we've had a lot of firms who join COR® because they bid work that requires COR® certification to qualify. And in that, there's a requirement or a need for more knowledge around the return on investment, and companies do improve or invest in health and safety for different reasons. And effort towards confirming a return on investment was one, to acknowledge and recognize and be able to measure the human impact of workplace injuries that are avoided because a company achieves COR® certification and improves their safety.

There were also with that too, is saved costs to both the company and to the insurance systems in the different provinces. So that was important to us, and we know that we're confident that the claims avoided in Ontario will be able to demonstrate a significant savings for the compensation system and the businesses in Ontario. And quite frankly, the way that we're all struggling in today's environment, savings in how we do businesses is very important.

Ken Rayner:

Absolutely. So Dr. McLeod, the majority of our listeners have some basic knowledge on how research is conducted, but I would say that the majority don't quite understand things from a comprehensive perspective, as same along with me. So, could you explain just the process that you use to collect and analyze the Ontario data?

Dr. Chris McLeod:

Yeah, sure. Just very briefly, we had the opportunity to use both information on COR® certification, that's data that's held by the Infrastructure Health and Safety Association, and link that comprehensively to WSIB firm level injury rates. Specifically, lost time, high impact, and no lost time claims. And we're able to do that very successfully. And so we've got a high degree of confidence in that linkage. And we can do it for however long a firm is registered with the WSIB.

Then one of the things that we do here is we're interested in the effect of COR® on a firm's injury performance. And so what we're really interested in is how their injury performance changes over time, compared to similar firms that aren't COR® certified. And so the important thing there is to identify comparison firms that are most similar. So, one of the things that we know is, at least at the moment, COR® certified firms in Ontario are different than the average sort of infrastructure health and safety type firm, whether that's largely in construction for what, 85 per cent of the firms. And but they're different, they're larger, they're in certain types of sectors, they've been around longer, so they're already a little bit more sophisticated.

So, one of the things that we have to be able to do is we've got to develop a research design that disentangles those other factors so that we can look at the real effect of COR® certification. And that's where the experience that I have had, in terms of evaluating these types of programs over 10 years comes into play, because we know how to do this, right? And we've done this and we've learned and we've approved the approach. And so we're actually able to, as best we can with this type of data, identify comparative firms, firms that are similar, and then compare their experience with those that are COR® certified. And then we look at whether or not we see differences in how their injury rate has changed during this period of time. And then we're able to sort of back that out of the analysis and get a sense of the effectiveness of COR®, in terms of whether it truly reduces a firm's injury rate while they're certified.

I will say that we do have a research brief, which I think will be also made available with this podcast. And so that also describes some of the methodology and those types of things that people find that helpful as well.

Ken Rayner:

Excellent. Thank you, Dr. McLeod. So we did the study and you've got the results. So what were the results of the Ontario Study of COR®-certified firms versus similar firms who are not COR certified?

Dr. Chris McLeod:

During the period in which they're COR® certified, on average they have about a 28% decrease in their injury rate compared to firms that are not COR® certified. So basically what that means, firm comes into the... Group of firms come in, they become COR® certified, and they experience a decrease in their injury rate, and that's about a 20 per cent reduction in their injury, which is large. So, this is a large intervention effect. I've been studying health and safety intervention effects for upwards of two decades now, and the types of intervention effects that we see with COR are larger, or are is the largest that I've seen. And in this case, the 28 per cent is among the high side with respect to COR® as well.

So, it's a large finding, and it's also statistically significant in so far as that's important to people. And so it's a meaningful impact, and that goes back to I think the comments that Paul made earlier on around the return on investment. So when you map on a 28% reduction in injury rate onto return on an investment, in terms of cost of claims as well as the overall burden of injury and illness to workers, it's quite large and significant.

Ken Rayner:

So Dr. McLeod, being a parent of two working-age young adults, we'll say, to me that's a real significant difference. That if I had both my children looking to take jobs in high-risk, high-hazard industries in Ontario, asking them if that company they're applying to is COR certified could certainly be a very important question.

Dr. Chris McLeod:

Yeah, I think it's a fair and valid question, and when I give these types of interviews, advice that I give to workers is, before you sign up to work for an employer, is ask about their health and safety record. And if an employer is COR certified, it does demonstrate a higher level of health and safety commitment, and that is a good thing.

Ken Rayner:

And Dr. McLeod, can you just get into a little bit more detail regarding the comparison firms that were used for this study so our listeners have a better understanding of, you took this cohort of COR certified firms and you compared them to another cohort of firms within Ontario. Were COR certified firms compared to any and all non-COR certified firms, or how did that work?

Dr. Chris McLeod:

Yeah, so what we did there is we did a matching. So we first of all limited all of the firms to firms that could be potentially certified for COR. So that's essentially firms that have industry classifications that fall under the Infrastructure Health and Safety Association's purview. And then we did a detailed comparison, looking at the characteristics of COR firms versus those that are non-COR certified. And we found that there were differences on a number of key variables.

Two of the variables that we see the largest differences are on firm size and also, industry sector. And so with respect to firm size, we have upwards of about 50 per cent of COR certified firms have greater than 100 FTEs, whereas non-COR[®]-certified firms, it's about 65 per cent of them have less of, one to four FTEs. So, there's a really big difference there. So we don't want to compare a large construction company of 100 to a small construction company of less than 20, so we don't. We match or we identify and we bring in companies that are similar on firm size. And then we also do that on sector. We also do that on their injury rate experience prior to COR certification. And we do that on what other types of programs they've participated in over the past number of years.

And so at the end of the day, in terms of the type of data that we collect, the WSIB, be it the Infrastructure Health and Safety Association, we use all those characteristics to get firms that are most comparable. And then we put that into a rigorous statistical framework that also helps account for, attempt to small differences between controls and treated. And so, we take those two things together and at the end of the day, we get a pretty rigorous research design that allows us to basically infer and identify the impact of COR[®] certification on a firm's injury rate.

Ken Rayner:

So Paul, can I move to you, in terms of, so you've engaged with University of British Columbia, they did this study in multiple provinces, Saskatchewan, BC twice, Alberta. The study comes to you and you open

up sort of or you're informed of what the results were. First question I've got is, as the executive responsible for COR over the past 10 years in Ontario, what did seeing those numbers mean to you personally? And then secondly, what do you believe these results of this research study mean to IHSA and its members?

Paul Casey:

I think to your first question, Ken. The first reaction is gratification that there was consistent findings across the many studies that UBC has conducted into the Certificate of Recognition program that demonstrates that this program actually has a workplace impact, a positive workplace impact. Whereby companies who were able to demonstrate that they meet the requirements of the program have improved performances, which leads to improved workplace safety. And that's the first thing that really came to me. And the consistency is important in anything you're doing. So, you could create something tomorrow, but if you can't replicate that implementation and have consistent results is not of much value. So, the consistency is huge.

The next thing is the confirmation for us in Ontario that we have been doing the right thing. We as a safety association, you have certain tools that you can use. We have training, we have consulting, and then over a decade ago, we added auditing to the Certificate of Recognition standard, and that gave us a new tool. And so there were many companies who came very quickly to the table and say, "I want to be recognized by this," and then there were a whole lot who didn't.

So, in my head, the plan, next step is kind of two phases. It's educate, take the data and explain it to the workplaces that we service and explain to them the benefits, the outcome, the value, and work with them to achieve the same results. And then the marketing comes with, okay, well let's make this valuable, not just to the workplace that's being certified, but to all of those who are doing business. Who do you want to work with? Who do you want to work for? How do you want to be recognized? All of these things are important in business, and COR® companies have demonstrated that they exceed and excel in protecting their workers. And we want to make sure that the general public, the people who buy their products and services, and the government understand that.

An important thing to note too, the average company strives for legal compliance, yet they lack a gauge for legal compliance. So, when Ontario brought COR® to be, we added a requirement that companies must be compliant to get certified as a bottom line. And then on top of that, they must achieve certain benchmarks to get certified. And so right away, those who are saying, "Well, we just want to be compliant," well, you can achieve that in COR®.

And then the other piece of it is in the last couple of years, the Workplace Safety Insurance Board introduced a program called the Health and Safety Excellence Program. And if there's one thing I heard over the years from companies is that becoming COR® certified or managing health and safety is expensive. It takes time, resources, and effort, and all of those things are true. And the expense, that depends on the level or the sophistication of their program to start with. So, what the Excellence Program offered by the WSIB allows companies to do is to get reimbursed for some of those expenses, some of those costs, and offset it.

And I just spoke with our new manager of the Excellence program who told me a story, and I like telling stories, but her story talked about a company that bought a new welder, a welding machine with their

rebate. And I thought, well, isn't this something? This is real tangible workplace improvement based on being safer. And I think that's great, and I think companies need to realize that they can build their program, achieve COR®, and along the way receive financial incentives. So that's the marketing piece.

So, educate about the real true results and impacts, and then market on what the benefits can be. And hopefully more companies move forward and start working towards achieving COR.

Ken Rayner:

Yeah, tremendous news in terms of the past 10 years, as you mentioned, Paul, well over 500 certified firms, thousands that are registered and working towards the program. Just receiving validation that a COR® companies statistics have shown 28 per cent less when it comes to lost time injury rates, and 20% less on high impact injury claims. Fantastic news.

So Dr. Chris McLeod, special thanks to you and your team for putting this research study together and presenting the results. Thank you so much for being with us today. And Paul, thank you again for joining us on the IHSA Safety Podcast. Pleasure to have you both here.

Paul Casey:

Thanks, Ken.

Dr. Chris McLeod:

Great, thank you.

Enzo Garritano:

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