



**Announcer:**

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

**Ken Rayner:**

Welcome to the IHSA Safety Podcast. I'm Ken Rayner, and I'm your host for this episode on Ontario's Fleet Safety Council. My guests joining me today are Donna Bisch, Health and Safety Manager at Stericycle, and Charlie Charalambous, Coordinator, Research, Stakeholder and Public Relations at IHSA. Great to have you both here. Thanks for joining us.

Charlie, how about we start with you? All right. So what's the best way, Charlie, to describe the Fleet Safety Council to a listener who's hearing about it for the first time on this podcast?

**Charlie Charalambous:**

Thanks, Ken. The Fleet Safety Council simply put, is an association of safety professionals from across the province all working together to promote health and safety in the transportation, transport, bus, and coach industries. It's a non-profit association and we're managed by a volunteer network. We have eight chapters and essentially we're open to anyone with an interest in transportation safety. We meet regularly, we share best practices, and we have a variety of guest speakers who speak on a number of health and safety-related topics that are relevant to our membership.

**Ken Rayner:**

All right, sounds interesting. So, Donna, you've been involved with the Fleet Safety Council, as I understand, for a little while now. Could you explain maybe what your current role is and then what initially attracted you to begin attending these council meetings?

**Donna Bisch:**

Sure. Thanks, Ken. Well, I'm currently the past chair of the Fleet Safety Council Toronto Chapter, as well as the Chair of the Joint Executive Committee, which makes up the executive for the provincial committee consisting of the chairs and vice-chairs from each chapter. I was introduced to the Fleet Safety Council back in 2003 by an IHSA consultant who had suggested I check it out as I was new to the industry and he had indicated that it would be a great resource.

I remember my first meeting being intimidating, walking into a male-dominated room thinking, "What am I getting myself into?" I was no doubt one of the youngest and most inexperienced members there. However, I was soon intrigued and engaged as I saw it was a great opportunity to meet people and to gain knowledge and understanding of the transportation industry.

One meeting turned into two and it wasn't long that I had a couple of members respectively take me under their wing and become my mentors. It really opened up a lot of doors for me and it has contributed to my professional development today.

**Ken Rayner:**

Fantastic, and it's great that you felt comfortable enough as someone who's inexperienced being amongst experienced professionals, that you felt comfortable enough to continue to attend the meeting. So you said 2003. Charlie, do you have her beat from a seniority perspective? Were you there before 2003 or did you come after?

**Charlie Charalambous:**

I think it might've been a couple of years after. I think I was around 2005, 2006, but very similar to Donna, I was invited to attend a meeting of the Toronto Chapter while I was at my previous employer, and the topic being discussed that day was sleep apnea, and a well-known doctor was going to be speaking on the topic. And as somebody that has sleep apnea, this piqued my interest and after one meeting I was hooked and asked my employer if this is something that I could attend regularly, and just the rest from there is history. After attending the meetings for a few years, I joined the Toronto Chapter Executive Committee helping out with speakers and presentations, and after that I moved into the role, I was elected to Vice Chairperson and finally Chairperson. So it's been a great ride ever since.

**Ken Rayner:**

Wow, amazing. Okay, so you talked about history. So as I understand, the Fleet Safety Council was formed almost 60 years ago, so this has been around for a while. Maybe Donna has talked a little bit about the structure of the council. Can we just touch on that a little bit more? And maybe, Charlie, what's the story about how this all started?

**Charlie Charalambous:**

Yeah, no way. Back in 1964, a small group of commercial driver trainers all got together. They met at a hotel in Toronto and they wanted to discuss forming an organization that in their opinion would help improve driver safety among commercial drivers. As a result of that meeting in January of 1965, the very first meeting of what was then called the Transportation Safety Association Council of Driver Trainers, a little bit of a tongue twister. That took place with seven members in attendance. That group itself would later become the Toronto Chapter. And then over the years things started to grow and change and form and the need for regional chapters grew, and that's how we got to where we're at today with eight chapters across the province.

**Ken Rayner:**

Wow, excellent. Okay. So, Donna and Charlie, you've both admitted that you've been involved in the Fleet Safety Council for more than 15 years. You didn't say how old you were when you started, so we're leaving that one alone. But obviously you both find great value in continuing to participate and also to become more involved as members of the executive. Could you share with some of our listeners, maybe some of the highlights that illustrates the value of attending regional chapter meetings and an

event that we haven't even discussed yet, which is the Annual Fleet Safety Council Conference? So maybe, Donna, I'll start with you. What are some of those attributes or highlights that provided you with a lot of value over the years?

**Donna Bisch:**

Sure. So for me, it became a great platform for networking whereby I was motivated and strived to be a part of the bigger picture to really work towards making a difference. Taking on the various positions of recording secretary, treasurer, vice chair, and chair for the Toronto chapter allowed me to work with various leaders in the industry, giving me the opportunity to share my experience and skillset accordingly, and gaining so much in return. In addition, with the various guest speakers and resources introduced during the monthly meetings, it also provided me with great takeaways over the years that has allowed me to make a meaningful contribution as a certified safety professional, as well as within the organization that I'm employed with.

**Ken Rayner:**

All right. Charlie, how about you?

**Charlie Charalambous:**

Yeah. Again, just to touch on what Donna just said, where else can you have a doctor come in and speak to the membership one month and then the next month you have a lawyer come in? A lot of our speakers are members and some of them are industry subject matter experts who really see the value in speaking to our membership, and we really do bring out some great speakers with, I think the term that Donna used there was lots of takeaways, something that you can take away and implement or use at work when you get back. So that's been great.

And then, Ken, you ask about the conference. It's been around for over 30 years now. We just hosted our 31st annual conference this last October. It's structured around a one-day educational event, and we've consistently sold out, at least for the last seven or eight years. A few years ago, we even had to move to a larger venue because the demand was there and we had a wait list of delegates that wanted to attend. We host one day of education, and our goal as part of the conference committee, which Donna and I both participate on, is to find speakers that have not spoken at our regional chapters over the last year, so the content is all new and relevant to our members. We also work really hard to find great keynotes that we know are going to bring additional value, and again, something that our membership, our delegates can take away.

The day before the conference, we also have our annual networking day, which includes something like a bowling event in the afternoon for the members to get together and have a good time, followed by our annual networking reception, which takes place in the evening, and actually takes place where our sponsored trade showroom is. So the sponsors get a little bit of exposure and our members get to interact and mingle a little bit before the education the next day.

**Ken Rayner:**

Fantastic. Okay. So I mean, this is very positive. We're talking about a couple of professionals such as yourself who started both attending meetings back in 2003, 2006. You've continued today, you've seen lots of value, you've now stepped up and you're participating as members of the executive and helping to coordinate these sessions. For someone who's interested in becoming a member, Donna, and I'm asking this kind of tongue in cheek because I know what the costs are, but they're so reasonable. So maybe share. So someone that's listening, going, "Well, this sounds really great, must cost a lot to attend this." Amazingly enough, it doesn't. So what are some of those costs for a member, either it's individual or corporate member? What does that look like for joining the Fleet Safety Council?

**Donna Bisch:**

So most chapters charge \$50 for an individual membership or \$100 for a corporate membership, which allows for three people from the same organization to attend the chapters meetings. Now, most chapters host 10 meetings a year between September and June. We do take the summer months off July and August. And our northern chapter, because of the large geographical area our members travel in from, hosts four meetings per year.

**Ken Rayner:**

Wow.

**Donna Bisch:**

Yeah. Each meeting is approximately two and a half hours and most meetings usually having industry guest speaker as Charlie and I've mentioned too, who provides our members with all kinds of latest updates in our industry and guest speakers have included, but are not limited to the MTO [Ministry of Transportation Ontario], OPP [Ontario Provincial Police], CBSA [Canadian Border Safety Agency], and legal experts. So our members also receive a monthly correspondence newsletter as well with information on the Fleet safety Council updates, IHSA updates, industry news, and regulatory news, as well as press releases. So a lot of great resources and information.

**Ken Rayner:**

Wow. So they're getting all of that in about two and a half hours for what would cost essentially like a specialty coffee at Starbucks?

**Donna Bisch:**

Exactly.

**Ken Rayner:**

Wow.

**Donna Bisch:**

Exactly.

**Ken Rayner:**

That's good. So \$50 for an individual for the entire year and \$100 for a corporate membership, and that includes up to three participants that can attend. So if you're getting a corporate membership, even greater value if you're going to attend some of those chapters that have 10 meetings a year. Fantastic. Okay.

Charlie, maybe we'll finish up with you with this question is what do you suggest to a listener? Now we've piqued their interest, you shared some information, you've shared your own experiences, both of you, we've just talked about the cost, which shouldn't be prohibitive for anybody for joining. What do you suggest to a listener who's interested in learning more about the Fleet Safety Council, Charlie?

**Charlie Charalambous:**

I guess your first stop would be visit our website, [fleetsafetycouncil.com](http://fleetsafetycouncil.com). From there, you're able to find out more information about our chapters, our meeting schedule, the guest speakers, just all information about the Fleet Safety Council. And there you can find the information online or I'll provide it as well, but you can either call or email us to find out more. Our phone number, which is generic for the entire Fleet Safety Council and monitored by us is 1-800-263-5024 extension 6040, or you can email us at [admin@fleetsafetycouncil.com](mailto:admin@fleetsafetycouncil.com). But the best thing you can do is just reach out. As a non-member, we can make arrangements for any of the chapters for you to attend a meeting as a guest. No obligation, come out for free, check it out. I can guarantee that you're going to like it, you're going to see the value in it, and you're going to want to join.

**Ken Rayner:**

Fantastic. And hopefully someone that joins this year, we can do a podcast with them in about 15 years' time and they can talk about all their experiences.

**Charlie Charalambous:**

Perfect.

**Ken Rayner:**

Fantastic. So thank you to you both. I know we've been wanting to do this one for a long time. The Fleet Safety Council is a phenomenal resource that we certainly recommend to anybody that is a safety professional, anybody that wants to really get more information about creating a safe and healthy workplace, the Fleet Safety Council is an amazing resource for doing that. So, Donna Bisch from Stericycle, Charlie Charalambous from IHSA, thank you so much for joining us today on this important podcast. And thank you, listeners, for listening to the *IHSA Safety Podcast*. Be sure to subscribe and like us on your podcast channel and visit us on [ihsa.ca](http://ihsa.ca) for a wealth of health and safety resources and information.

**Announcer:**

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