Announcer:

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

Ken Rayner:

Welcome to the *IHSA Safety Podcast*. I'm your host, Ken Rayner. On this episode of the podcast, we're joined by Elias Rafoul, Vice President of Accreditation Services at the Standards Council of Canada. Welcome to the podcast, Elias.

Elias Rafoul:

Hi, Ken. Thank you for having me.

Ken Rayner:

Hey, it's great to have you here. All right. Elias, standards impact all kinds of different aspects of our professional and personal lives. Within occupational health and safety in the province of Ontario, we've really began leveraging standards such as a training standard for working at heights and for joint health and safety committee training, along with management standards, system standards such as COR® and ISO 45000. Very interested to get into this discussion about how we continue to leverage standards to create a high level of consistency and know that the Standards Council of Canada contributes to creating and maintaining standards that help companies and industries achieve that high level of consistency. Really interested in unpacking all that on the Standards Council of Canada and how you contribute to help us all work safer.

Elias, maybe let's start with an overview of the history of the Standards Council of Canada, if we could, and what services that it provides to Canadian businesses.

Elias Rafoul:

Absolutely, Ken. Standards Council of Canada, we started over 50 years ago through an act of government. Since then, the council is actually pretty unique in the world as an organization in that it has the role of both the standards and accreditation. It covers the full standardization spectrum. It's not the case in most parts of the world, and we see this as being a big, big advantage for SCC, we were Canada's representative at ISO and IEC [International Electrotechnical Commission] international organizations. I'm sure at least some of you listeners have heard about some of the world's well-known standards set by them. This anecdote gives a good idea of the culture at ISO.

Although it seems like an acronym, it's really not. Because the name would have had different acronyms, different languages, the founders decided to give it the short form ISO, which is derived from the Greek isos, meaning equal. It's a consensus-based model. Each country has one vote. As a member, we ensure programs align with national priorities, they reflect the latest knowledge and promote inclusion and diversity as we help shape tomorrow's standards.

Our participation happens through mirror committees, which are made up of Canadian subject matter experts from various sectors, including businesses. They contribute greatly to the development and content of international standards and also gain opportunities to grow their networks, share knowledge and advance Canada's interests. On the other end of the spectrum, and where I'm involved, is accreditation, which boils down to checking the checkers and really testing the testers. We go and assess organizations that are certifying, testing, inspecting and verifying are competent, consistent, and impartial. It's a way to make sure that standards are applied correctly.

Going back to the Standards Council of Canada, we ultimately want to help make life safer, healthier, and more sustainable, help people, communities and businesses in Canada prosper. We have lots to offer to Canadian businesses. In fact, we've worked with Canadian innovators by guiding, facilitating, and collaborating with them every step of the way along the path to standardization. That's both nationally and internationally.

We've supported Canadian innovators to be elected as chairs or secretaries of relevant technical committees to manage and guide the standards drafting process. We've also engaged Canadian regulators to ensure new standards supporting Canadian innovations are referenced in relevant federal, provincial, and territorial regulations, and in procurement where appropriate.

We help innovators design supportive international certification and accreditation programs to facilitate international market access and regulatory compliance once standards are published. When it comes to accreditation, we are signatories to multilateral agreements with international accreditation organizations. That helps ensure certification issued in different countries are consistent and recognized across the globe so products and services certified under these umbrellas can be accepted everywhere with confidence.

Standards and conformity assessment help remove unnecessary trade barriers by providing the assurance that products and services adhere to government and market requirements. This encourages the free flow of goods, services, and workers within Canada and enhancing domestic supply chains. Did you know that at least 80 per cent of the world's trade involves some level of conforming assessment to standards?

Ken Rayner:

Wow. We have the Standards Council of Canada representing Canada on the world stage. The Standards Council is the only voting member. Not only are you helping to create standards, then you're evaluating those that audit those standards to making sure that they're doing everything from a guideline perspective and that the standards are working as intended. That's an incredibly important piece of our business community. I mean, the Standards Council of Canada should be known by everybody in business for in terms of what you contribute. That's amazing.

Well, let's get into that maybe if we could, Elias. Maybe we could help our listeners better understand what are some of those aspects of their everyday lives that are impacted by standards that maybe they don't even consider that a standard would impact that piece of society's function.

Elias Rafoul:

It truly touches everything around you from the food you eat to the clothes you wear and everyday tools that make your life easier, like cell phones and eyeglasses. There are standards for just about everything. As I've said already, standards and conformity assessment ensure safety and enable people to go about their day with confidence. To borrow from our CEO Chantal Guay, a practical example she often uses to explain how standardization works is electrical safety.

Standards, whether international standards or national standards or even a technical specification, are embedded in our electrical code and regulations and work like an invisible shield. When you enter a room and turn on the switch, you don't worry about being electrocuted or starting a fire. You trust that the infrastructure is safe and resilient and that the system keeps installers, consumers, and their families from harm.

The *Canadian Electrical Code* has been around for more than 90 years and is regularly updated to reflect the latest advancements in technology. It also meets the fundamental safety principles of international standards, leveraging international best practices while adapting them to our country's needs. As I mentioned earlier, conformity assessment and accreditation also play a key role in ensuring that everything works as intended and bring trust in our electrical infrastructure.

As it relates to your sector, standards also play a pivotal role in keeping workers safe across industries. They provide comprehensive guidelines and best practices that address potential hazards and promote safe working conditions. Whether it's in construction, manufacturing, healthcare, standards outline safety protocols, risk assessment methodologies, and protective measures that employers must implement. They cover areas such as personal protective equipment, also known as PPE, machine guarding, ergonomic design, hazardous substance handling, and electrical safety. By adhering to these standards, employers can create work environments that prioritize worker safety, reduce the risk of accidents and injuries, and ensure compliance with regulatory requirements. Standards provide a common language and framework for employers, employees, and regulatory bodies, fostering a culture of safety and accountability in the workplace.

Ken Rayner:

Covering the gamut. One thing that you mentioned at the beginning, Elias, is ISO, I-S-O. Some of our listeners, particularly those maybe of our vintage, would remember driving by many buildings, businesses and seeing huge banners celebrating something with the word ISO and a bunch of numbers after it. That might be what some of our listeners are thinking of as we refer to what would be workplace management systems. Maybe we can get into a little bit about that. But why would an organization…what would be that value that an organization would receive if they implemented a workplace management system? Then what are some of the examples of such management systems? What does all those ISO and all those numbers mean on those banners that you see displayed, not as much anymore, but certainly in the past, so prominently on lots of buildings?

Elias Rafoul:

Absolutely, Ken. Well, implementing a workplace management system can bring several valuable benefits to an organization. It can enhance operational efficiencies by streamlining processes, optimizing resource allocation, and of course improving productivity. Overall, it promotes better organization and coordination, facilitating effective communication, collaboration and teamwork among employees. It enables enhanced decision-making through access to real-time data and performance metrics leading to informed and strategic choices. And finally, it supports compliance with regulatory requirements and industry standards, ensuring a safe and compliant work environment.

There are many different types of management systems. In fact, ISO 9000 family of Standards is the most popular family of standards. Quality management system, or QMS as we call it, helps organizations maintain and improve product and service quality by implementing standardization processes, quality control measures, and continuous improvement practices. It enhances customer satisfaction, operational efficiency, and of course competitiveness.

At the Standards Council of Canada, we offer accreditation for 12 management system programs, including quality management systems. On our roster of offerings, we have the following: CyberSecure Canada, information security, aerospace, business continuity, energy, environmental, food safety, management systems for medical device manufacturers, forestry, and anti-bribery.

The management system that your audience is likely most familiar with is occupational health and safety management systems, which provides a framework for managing an organization's occupational health and safety responsibilities. It enables them to improve health and safety performance and reduce or prevent injuries, illnesses, and of course fatalities. Occupational health and safety management systems provides a framework for managing an organization's health and safety responsibilities.

The Standards Council of Canada accredits certification bodies that assess and certify occupational health and safety management systems to international standards. In this case, *ISO 45001: Occupational Health and Safety*.

Even as we work in traditional accreditation domains, our accreditation services team is actively preparing for the impacts and implications of cutting-edge technologies and trends such as artificial intelligence and data privacy. Our world-first pilot for AI management systems is proceeding in parallel with standards development to provide a market-ready artificial intelligence conformity assessment as early as possible.

As you can see, we're also innovative and future-focused. Our accreditation and conformity assessments help remove technical barriers to trade and pave the way for Canadian companies to access new markets.

Ken Rayner:

Wow, okay. We got a little bit into, I heard you mention certification bodies, and we were talking a little bit more about what it means to be an accreditation body. Now the Standards Council of Canada is considered a global accreditation body, not just an accreditation body for Canada. Maybe we can talk about that and explain, Elias, maybe a little bit more about what an accreditation body does and how it pertains to those certification bodies who are the ones that go in and conduct the audits at companies,

who are going in to assess the readiness of their system and if they meet the standard, then they're achieving a being certified to that standard. How does the Standards Council of Canada participate in that model?

Elias Rafoul:

Absolutely. We are a global organization. We have customers from all over the world. Like I've already mentioned, accreditation plays a vital role in ensuring the standards are applied correctly. As an accreditation body, our main role is to test the testers and check the checkers themselves, including certification bodies, verification bodies, testing and calibration laboratories, and of course inspection bodies.

You already know that accreditation provides an independent and objective assessment of these entity's technical competence, reliability, and integrity. Through rigorous evaluation and ongoing monitoring, accreditation verifies that these organizations have the necessary expertise, resources, and quality management systems in place to consistently deliver accurate and reliable results. By subjecting certification bodies and testing laboratories to accreditation, it helps instill confidence in the accuracy and validity of their assessments, certifications, and of course their test reports.

Accreditation acts as a quality mechanism, fostering trust and credibility in the application of standards, ultimately enhancing the overall reliability, consistency, and effectiveness of conforming assessment activities. It ensures that standards are implemented correctly and that the results provided by accredited bodies are trustworthy and meet the expected level of quality.

I've talked a few times about the idea of testing the testers. On top of that, as an accreditation body, we are also assessed. We undergo pure evaluation by the International Accreditation Forum, or IAF, and the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation, also known as ILAC, to maintain our international recognition, validating that we also perform our work competently and according to harmonized standards.

I've alluded to this at the start of our conversation, but to reiterate, these organizations' main function is to develop a single, worldwide conformity assessment program that assures accredited systems certificates can be trusted. Multilateral arrangements with these international accreditation organizations help ensure certifications issued in different countries by organizations that are accredited by accreditation bodies that are signatories to these arrangements are consistent and recognized across the globe so that products and services certified under these umbrellas can be accepted everywhere with confidence.

Our customers, the conformity assessment bodies, range from multinational companies that undertake all types of conformity assessment activities, like testing, inspections and certification, two organizations that offer national services within one specific country or small, localized entities that work in a specific sector and region.

Certification bodies would choose to seek accreditation from a reputable accreditation body, like the Standards Council of Canada, to show that an independent confirmation of their competence and independence.

When it comes to operating in the global marketplace or even within Canada, third-party certification is often a specified requirement from regulators or governments or listed in procurement requirements. In terms of governance, as a government of Canada Crown Corporation, the Standards Council of Canada is held to the highest standard of transparency and accountability. This lens added reliability to our accreditation services.

Ken Rayner:

Elias, you've got the company that is looking to implement a management standard. You have the certification body. You have the accreditation body that is the Standards Council of Canada, as an example, and then you've got the IAF. Not only are you checking the checker, another checker is checking you. There is all kinds of governance when you have an accredited mark on a certificate. Obviously, there's a lot more rigmarole and checking and verification to ensure that everybody is doing what they should be doing. That's fair?

Elias Rafoul:

Absolutely, that's absolutely the case.

Ken Rayner:

Let me ask you this then, maybe this is the last question, what advice would the Standards Council of Canada, who is our lone representative at ISO, what would you give to a Canadian company who is weighing the value between, and let's use it for the purposes of health and safety, let's use ISO 45001, the 2018 edition, what would be the value between an accredited certificate and one that is unaccredited? What advice would the Standards Council of Canada give to a Canadian company in that regard?

Elias Rafoul:

That's a great question, Ken. Thank you for asking. What I would say is the Standards Council of Canada would advise any Canadian company to prioritize accredited certificates over unaccredited ones. As we've talked about at length today, accreditation provides independent verification of technical competence, impartiality and reliability of conformity assessment bodies. By choosing an accredited certificate, the company can then ensure that its product services and processes have been evaluated by a competent and recognized authority, giving them greater confidence in the reliability and acceptance of their offering.

But I really want to emphasize that accredited certificates are widely recognized and accepted because through accreditation, the certification bodies that issue them are thoroughly assessed to make sure they demonstrate a commitment to quality, impartiality and compliance with standards.

You must be wondering how can a company know whether a certificate is accredited or not. One way is by going to the Standards Council of Canada website and to look through our directory of accredited bodies. Other accredited bodies that are signatories to international mutual recognition, like the United Kingdom Accreditation Service, for example, have also such directories.

You can also look for the Standards Council of Canada symbol, which we make available to organizations we accredit, like certification bodies, to show their accreditation status with us. These are specific to a particular accreditation program. It signifies that the result or certifications issued by the accredited body are reliable, impartial, and of high quality. This mark instills confidence in the certificate holder, the consumer, and other stakeholders as it assures them that the product, service or process has been evaluated by an independent and competent authority, thus promoting trust, credibility, and market acceptance.

Ken Rayner:

Fantastic. There you go. There's the recommendation from the Standards Council of Canada. If you're looking at becoming certified to ISO 45001, I think you've gotten from Elias a whole host of reasons as to why you'd want to choose an accredited certificate, one with the accreditation mark, which could be the Standards Council of Canada, or it could be UKAS. It could be one of those other global recognized organizations under the IAF.

Elias, thank you so much for being here. That was terrific. I know our listeners have learned a lot more about the Standards Council of Canada and about every aspect of what it is you contribute to society and how you help us ensure consistency across the board. Thank you very much for joining us.

Elias Rafoul:

Absolutely, Ken. Thank you for having me. I would extend an invitation to our listeners to reach out if there are further questions. I know this was a fairly compressed conversation. Happy to answer more questions, go into the details of some of the programs that we offer. We're always keen to hear from listeners and Canadians from all across the country, so please reach out. Contact information is on our website at SCC.ca. Thank you very much.

Ken Rayner:

Terrific. Excellent. Thank you. Thank you to the listeners for listening to the *IHSA Safety Podcast*. Be sure to subscribe and like us on your podcast channel and visit us at IHSA.ca for a wealth of health and safety resources and information.

Announcer:

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