



Announcer

It is time for the *IHSA Safety Podcast*.

Ken Rayner:

Welcome to the *IHSA Safety Podcast*. Thrilled today to have with us Maren Gamble. Maren is one of our experts on occupational health and safety management systems at IHSA, and we're thrilled to have her here. Maren, thank you so much for joining us on this podcast.

Maren Gamble:

Thanks for having me, Ken.

Ken Rayner:

All right. And Maren, I know you've got extensive experience with building, implementing, and auditing occupational health and safety management systems, and this podcast here is going to be on the Health and Safety Excellence program and explaining it and making sure it's clear to our listeners all the benefits that come with it. But before we get into that, Maren, maybe you could share a little bit about your background and in terms of what you've done with management systems in your career.

Maren Gamble:

Absolutely. Thanks, Ken. So for me, management systems and my interest in health and safety management systems goes back well over 10 years at this point. And at that time, I did start working as a health and safety manager for a general contractor that does ICI [industrial, commercial, institutional] building in the Toronto area, in general. And that was an organization that was really just starting out on their journey, building their health and safety management system and was doing so using the COR® program, in Ontario. At that time, the COR® program was in its pilot stage, it was early days, but this organization wanted to use that standard to build a program and move forward as a leader in safety. So, there I was, developing a system for the first time for this general contractor.

I did work with them to develop policies and programs that were going to work for that organization. We did eventually achieve the COR® certification and then I worked with them as their internal COR® auditor for a number more years before moving on. When I say moving on, I was lucky enough to have the opportunity then to move into a role as a COR® consultant with the IHSA. So at that point, I'd gotten to this point where my passion for health and safety management systems was fully ingrained into the fibre of my being and I was ready to try and share that with the wider world, with the industry. And moving to the IHSA really did afford me that opportunity to take what I'd learned working for that general contractor and start sharing that with other people in a consulting context.

So there, I was able to consult with people on building their systems as well as continue performing audit reviews and audits themselves and just get that exposure to a variety of different firms, a variety of different industries and all the different kinds of unique structures that people have out there in our membership industries.

Finally, and the reason that brings me here today for our podcast to talk about the Health and Safety Excellence program, I have somewhat recently moved into a new role within the IHSA, to be the Manager of Strategic Programs for the Health and Safety Excellence program. This is a really exciting opportunity to further expand that passion and joy for health and safety management systems as I get to work with a team of excellent consultants to help firms that are looking to build a health and safety management system, looking for a way to offset some costs, maybe looking for a way to get started if they're not sure how, and they're looking for a resource to help them get there. And that's where we get to come in and really help firms custom build something that's going to work for their organization.

Ken Rayner:

That's fantastic, Maren. So we've got you as a resource here talking about the Health and Safety Excellence program and you've implemented a program within a contractor. You have consulted on COR®, you have audited COR®, and now, you're overseeing the program of the Health and Safety Excellence program. So I can't think of a better person to be helping to explain this program to our listeners.

So the one thing about the Health and Safety Excellence program that I've found is there's lots of information online. So you can either go to the WSIB [Workplace Safety and Insurance Board] website, you can come to the IHSA website. There's a lot of information you can access there. But Maren, from your perspective, with all your knowledge and expertise, how would you explain the Health and Safety Excellence program and the value that it can bring to a workplace in Ontario to a listener who maybe has little to no knowledge of the program today?

Maren Gamble:

Yeah, that's an awesome question, because you're right. There's just a ton of information out there and it is all valuable information to have available to you if you were to engage with the program. But at its heart, what is the Health and Safety Excellence program? Or you might hear me say "H-SEP" while we're talking today, as a short form, and really to me, what it is, is this program that offers multiple layers of support to a firm that wants to develop a health and safety management system. They want to develop something that they don't have in their system, something that's going to be a big change and they want it to be meaningful to their firm.

So this is a program that allows the firm to tell us what they want to work on and get that support in a twofold structure where they're accessing consulting subject matter expertise, resources that we've worked on at the IHSA and then ultimately, on completion of the program, they may be eligible for those financial incentives that are associated with the program that you can get some rebates on your WSIB premiums that you would've paid as a firm.

So there's that financial support as well as the consulting and subject matter expertise support that you can get through the program. I think the other thing to note is that some people worry about the

requirements of a program like this and how will it fit? Is it going to be a lot of extra work? What we really like about this program is that it allows us to help our clients meet their own needs, achieve their own goals, work with whatever your goals for the year actually were, before you entered the program, and at the same time, build your own internal staff's knowledge and capacity to continue to grow on your own and really grow as a company and be your own entity. It's not a program that you're working to satisfy. It's a program that's working to satisfy your needs, for you.

Ken Rayner:

Excellent. And those needs, if we can say, in terms of a system for a small business owner or a contractor or a company that's out there, employer, they're looking to understand and identify the hazards in their workplace. They're looking to control those hazards in a means that's appropriate based on the risk. They're looking to train their employees, make sure that the training is done consistently, and then they're evaluating the effectiveness and then they're continually improving the program with management oversight. That would be a fair, just high level-

Maren Gamble:

And I think there's lots of different motivating factors that bring people in to look at those needs. In some cases, it is that there has been an incident, an injury, or an illness in your workplace that's got you looking at it. Sometimes, there's been some orders. Sometimes, you've just started to learn more information about this sort of thing. Maybe you listen to an IHSA podcast and you're excited to get involved in learning more. Sometimes, it is something like the COR® program where you're recognizing that you're working towards an audited accredited system standard that you're looking to achieve, and all of those things are possible with the Excellence Program because we're going to find out what your goals are and help you work towards your goals. We're not going to tell you what your goals should be. We're going to meet you where you're coming in.

Ken Rayner:

Excellent. So we're talking about, you just mentioned there, maybe some examples of candidates that could be ideal for the Health and Safety Excellence program. So for those potential candidates, Maren, what would be some of the financial benefits that they could realize if they joined the program either this year or next?

Maren Gamble:

Sure. So honestly, any employer that is looking to develop something significantly in their system or to change something is eligible to join the system, can come in, can earn those rebates for completing their topics. This is from a firm that's just starting out, to a firm that's more advanced in the system and those options are available. That being said, that right now for 2022 and continuing through to the end of 2023, there is a special incentive program that's being introduced through the WSIB that applies to the firms that are up to 99 full-time employees. These are being called smaller businesses. And if you fall in that smaller businesses category, they're adding some additional incentives to support you starting in this program. So, if a smaller business joins up and starts a plan, it's called an action plan within the system, choosing what you are going to work on for the year, there's going to be a rebate that you

qualify for, essentially, a signing bonus of \$1,000 that will be issued to your firm for initiating that action plan. That's to offset the cost of registration for your firm in the program.

If you were to register with the IHSA as a provider, for example, our businesses up to 49 employers have a registration cost of just over \$600 and the ones up to 99, 50 to 99 are at just over \$1,200. So if you compare that to what you would get back, it really is such a low risk, no risk time to join the program because those extra incentives to give it a shot are in place.

At the end of the program, there's also some extra incentives for those smaller businesses. A smaller business that's completing an action plan 2022, 2023, is going to be eligible for double the rebates they would traditionally be eligible for. There's a few other little tidbits in there that you can qualify for, but those are the important broad strokes of that incentive program that's in place now, in terms of the financial benefits. Honestly, like I said already, low risk, no risk. It's costing you nothing or almost nothing to join up and the potential benefits there are substantial.

Ken Rayner:

Wow. And to that, on top of that, I guess, Maren, as well, we know from recent research with the University of British Columbia that occupational health and safety management systems such as COR® can provide substantial reductions in lost time injuries and high impact claims. So we know that there's a benefit there. Now, the WSIB is adding to that significant additional financial incentive, so that's real attractive for an employer. Maybe we could talk about the process because we've talked about the reason why that employer should get in. What about the how? What's the process? How does somebody initiate starting and what does that look like?

Maren Gamble:

Sure. The process for the Excellence Program, and just to sort of tie this into what you were just saying as well with the COR® program, it's interesting you bring that up because the Health and Safety Excellence program really does serve as a good stepping stone towards a program like COR® that has that proven success rate that's in the industry. So, if you use the Health and Safety Excellence Program over a period of time, while you're getting ready to be at the stage to complete that audit, then you're going to be able to offset some of those costs of developing to that standard, while eye on the prize for that 28-per-cent reduction that we're seeing out there in the industry.

So what does that look like? Well, in each action plan that you activate, so this is your plan, essentially, the topics that you're going to choose for the year. You're able to choose up to five topics for one action plan, and that action plan can be active for up to 12 months. So with that, we say it can be active for up to 12 months. You can finish quicker, but we often see firms do take the 12 months and we encourage them to take the majority of the 12 months because in order for this really to work, you want to be able to develop a system, a piece of your system, implement that piece of your system, and then make sure that it's working and that's the intention of the Excellence program and that's where our consultants will help you through.

So we implemented using a plan, do, check, act cycle, that if you read some of the other IHSA resources available on our website, you'll see a lot of information on that topic. But using that process, our consultants will take you through, guide you through the journey for the Excellence Program. And using

the plan, do, check act, our consultants will really take you through the process and guide you from the beginning to the end.

So when it comes to the plan, the plan is in the early stages, this is going to be your first month and a half or so in the program. You're going to take some time to really develop your written standard, your policy, your procedure, whatever language you're using around that. This is, on your given topic, you're developing the what are we going to do as an organization. This is the piece that goes in your program manual. This is the piece that will be handed out to your field staff, and this is the piece that outlines how that implementation will take place. That's the plan stage.

At the end of that, you'll definitely want to talk to your consultant that you have on the IHSA team so they can give you some feedback on that. You can tap into their expertise on the topic and they can help provide you resources if there's anything you need to support that development.

The do, you're actually going to do what you said now. So you have that written plan, it's in place. Everyone on your team there is comfortable. Now, you're going to implement using training and communication strategies to make sure that your staff understand what that plan is and you're going to start to implement it in the workplace. This is what really takes time. You need to do this for at least three, four, more months to be able to see it really coming to life in your workplace. Depending on how often it comes up, it might take even longer than that, depending on the frequency that you implement it. So you really want to take some time to see it living and breathing in your workplace.

Then you get to start checking it, plan, do, check. This is the third step. Here's where you're going to make sure that the implementation is playing out the way you expected it to, that you're able to get those frequencies, that it's looking the way you thought it would be, and importantly, that it's achieving the goals that you wanted it to achieve.

If there's any gaps there, that's what the act stage is for. You're able to use that act stage to describe how you're going to use your continual improvement to move that system forward and close those gaps. That's what you're doing. That's what you would be doing anyway when you're developing a system.

What you're submitting for the Excellence Program and what your consultant will help you with is for each of those stages, you're submitting to us basically a story. What did you do? How did you do it, why did you do it? And then a little bit of evidence to support that for us. I like to think of it as, if you're reading a textbook or even like a children's book, any sort of book that's giving knowledge to someone in a context that they're not familiar with yet, that's how the communication of your experience goes. So you give them the language, you tell them in paragraph, and then you show them the illustrations. So this is what you turn to page two in your textbook, and it shows you an illustration of what they just tried to describe to you in words. That's what you're doing with your evidence. You're just showing them the bits and pieces that you put into place.

This is a fairly lengthy process. It sounds like a lot. I heard myself just saying all that and it sounded like a lot, but that's why we have the Excellence Program consultants at the IHSA. They're going to help you go through this piece by piece. They're going to provide insight and guidance. They'll help you submit things in the right way to the WSIB to make sure that your validations are successful and communicate the journey that you're going through. Again, this is the sort of process that you would want to go through

when you're developing the pieces of your system anyway, by engaging with it as part of the excellence program, you do get that support from our consultants on subject matter and potentially, those financial incentives as well at the conclusion of it.

Ken Rayner:

Right. So Maren, you've talked a couple of times about resources, right? And resources are going to be different at different size organizations. So a company with 99 people are just going to have probably different resources and different expertise and different experience when it comes to health, occupational health and safety than a company perhaps with eight employees. So what are the resources that are required for those different types of companies to successfully navigate or progress through the Health and Safety Excellence Program and then realize all those benefits you just talked about?

Maren Gamble:

Yeah. So this is a question that we get fairly frequently too, is about is it possible for me? And the reality is different size companies are going to already have different resources present in their organization and have different needs for what their resources are. We find that no matter the size of the organization, there are resources that can aid them through the process. So, if you're a company that does have 99 employees, you might already have a dedicated health and safety person, even a small health and safety department, these people on staff already provide you with a certain amount of expertise and competency and health and safety. So, for these firms, what you're going to get from the consulting team in of additional resource is a place to go to ask and get answers to your questions. So, when they're on a topic that they're not familiar with, we're going to be there to help your internal staff learn and grow and become even more well-rounded experts.

We're also going to help them navigate the system for submission. So again, I did mention earlier, our consultants are going to be well-versed on those milestones you need to hit, as well as how to access and communicate within the system. So for a larger company, we're going to work with the resources you have and help you further develop your internal resources to help you grow in that sense. Then you mentioned if it's a six-person company. In the case of a six-person company, I would be surprised to hear that they had a dedicated health and safety person amongst that six, probably all six of those people are wearing multiple hats, many, many hats and probably have a hand in every facet of the organization.

So in the case of that, more than likely, you're coming to us with the expertise of your work at a very high level. So the person that you have engaging with the Health and Safety Excellence program is also an expert. They're an expert in your organization. And so, what we can help you with in that case is taking your expertise in what you do and putting it onto that health and safety management system framework. We've got resources for that. We've got worksheets that are developed. We've got a background in doing that. So, we're going to help you expand your expertise that's in your work to include health and safety for your work. And again, of course, engage with the system and develop those milestones as in all cases. But the beauty of this program is really that. No matter what your firm is coming in with, we can offer other components to grow your organization into something that's more well-rounded.

Ken Rayner:

Okay. So we've talked about resources, we've talked about the financial benefits. We also know, Maren, that in terms of engagement with small businesses and in all kinds of different aspects, that a lot of times when somebody starts a small business, that they bring on people that they know. Those are sometimes some of their first employees. So what are the non-financial benefits that participating in the health and safety program can bring to an employer or a company based on keeping those that they care about or they know safe in the workplace?

Maren Gamble:

Yeah, that's an awesome question to ask, Ken. And an important part of this, right? We know that a lot of things can draw people into a program like this, and a lot of things might be the motivator to take the first step, now and in this moment. But one of the biggest factors, and we know this from talking to the industry, is always going to be keeping the people at work healthy and safe, so that they're going home. At the end of the day. No employer wants to have employees get hurt at work.

And when we think of that small business, where, as you mentioned, it's often close friends, it's family, it's people that are a part of your life beyond the workplace and beyond the business. The impacts of injury or illness in that setting, they go beyond the impacts of business. They go beyond those motivators for finances or general morality, and they hit close to home. They hit in our friends and family group. And so, when it comes to that, systems like this, programs like this, they make a difference. And that's why we offer this program. That's why we're passionate about this program, is because it's developing a system for your organization is going to make a difference in protecting the people you care about.

Ken Rayner:

And I know you're passionate about that, Maren, and that's why you're here today talking about it. And I know that any listener that's interested in learning more, you and your team would be more than happy to engage with them to answer questions. So what do you recommend to a listener of this particular podcast who's interested in learning more about the Health and Safety Excellence program?

Maren Gamble:

That's a good question. I hope that there are some interested people out there that would be looking to get involved in the program. One of the easy first stops is to go to the ihsa.ca website and go down to the Health and Safety Excellence page. But as we talked about right off the hop in this podcast, there is a lot there that might be not the best landing page to start with. So if you'd rather talk to us directly, you can scroll down on that page to near the bottom, the email contacts for the entire team are listed there, and you can reach out to either me or a member of my team and we'll definitely get in contact with you to discuss the experience, the program, what to expect. And if you don't even want to go on the website at all to look up those emails, which would be totally fair, you can always just reach out to us at excellenceprogram@ihsa.ca. That's our general email inbox, and your questions will make their way to me.

Ken Rayner:

Great. And Maren, we'll make it even easier for our listeners. We will put the link to your team's information right in the link for the podcast today. So that will make it easier. So, no excuses for not being able to find it.

Maren Gamble:

Awesome.

Ken Rayner:

Maren, thank you so much for being here today to help explain the Health and Safety Excellence program that we've talked about. It's one of the best programs out there in terms of rebates, opportunities, help, resources for businesses that are looking to create and build that and implement an occupational health and safety management system. So, thank you so much for being here today to explain that. Yeah. We appreciate all your advice.

Maren Gamble:

Thank you so much for having me, Ken. This was fun.

Ken Rayner:

And again, I'm Ken Rayner with IHSA. Thank you very much for listening to the IHSA Safety Podcast and our continued series on health and safety. So, 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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