



**Maren Gamble:**

New construction businesses in Ontario face enough pressure already. Health and safety should not add confusion. Hear directly from IHSA experts on what new owners need to know.

**Announcer:**

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

**Maren Gamble:**

Welcome to the IHSA Safety Podcast. I'm your host, Maren Gamble. On today's podcast, we're giving you a sneak peek into a new video series produced by IHSA called *Ask a Construction Health and Safety Expert* with Deb Moskal and David Dametto. We're going to speak with both Deb and Dave, along with the series host, Ken Rayner, about what you can expect from the series, why getting safety right from day one matters more than you might think, and how IHSA is here to support you with resources that won't break the bank.

Welcome, everybody. I think I'll start off today by going right to Ken. Ken, can you start by telling us about the *Ask a Construction Health and Safety Expert* series? What inspired IHSA to create it, and who is it really designed for?

**Ken Rayner:**

Yeah, I'd love to, Maren, and it's great to be a guest on the *IHSA Safety Podcast*, and have you doing the hosting duties today. So thank you for that.

Very much. Yeah.

**Ken Rayner:**

Yeah. You know what? There's a whole bunch of data and reasons for us to desire to create this series. One, in our five-year Strategic Plan, which we're going through right now, one of the four strategic objectives is to help small business achieve compliance. We know that can be a challenge for a lot of small businesses, particularly those that have just started up in the past three, six, 12 months, because they wear so many different hats, those small business construction owners.

They're doing business development. They're taking care of their finance. They have to do the HR. They've got to ensure operations is running and they've got all their equipment and supplies coming in. And oh, by the way, on top of all that, you have to make sure that you're protecting the health and safety of your workers and making sure everyone's going home safe. That's not an easy task.

We have a lot of newly registered construction businesses joining our membership every year. Maren, we've got over 10,000 new construction businesses joining IHSA every single calendar year. And so, we want to provide resources to them that are accessible, that are easy, that are free so they can utilize these resources whenever they have the opportunity and at their convenience.

This is really a series designed to provide fundamental information to those newly registered construction businesses. We know through some of the work being done by the Institute for Work and Health, they have a project going on taking a look at newly registered small businesses and what they need. One of the questions they've asked in that study is, when do new businesses want to receive occupational health and safety information?

What that study has shown us is that overwhelmingly, like over 90 per cent, want to either receive it at the time they register their business, even before they register their business, or at the least within three months. We want to provide this information to those new businesses right away so they can incorporate this information right into the routines and make these a habit right from the beginning.

**Maren Gamble:**

Wow. Ken, you really brought the numbers today. That was impressive in terms of... I'm even more excited about this series than I was five minutes ago. With 10,000 new businesses every year... I'm going to go over to Deb and say, Deb, why is it so important for those 10,000 new construction firms, especially those just registering with the WSIB, to get foundational health and safety guidance early in their journey?

**Deb Moskal:**

Right. When starting a business in the construction industry, new firms will face a pretty wide range of early priorities, everything from securing financing, to hiring their staff, focusing on the winning of contracts, and really building their operational capacity. At the core of all this though is one critical asset, which is the people.

The workers and the supervisors, they're not only central to getting the job done, they're essential to making sure that it's done safely. For many of our new business owners, the number of requirements and responsibilities that they're facing can feel daunting. However, we believe that with the access to the right guidance, the right tools, health and safety doesn't have to be intimidating. It rather becomes manageable, a very strategic part of their business, and ultimately empowering for the business owner as well as the workers and the supervisors.

Within the province of Ontario, legal compliance is a non-negotiable part of starting a construction business, and setting that strong foundation really is an essential part of that business. The foundation I'm talking about is health and safety. This really means developing strong practices, strong policies and procedures, conducting risk assessments, ensuring that the workers have proper training right from day one, and helping to establish these elements early will reduce or help to reduce the risk of incidents.

It helps to enhance due diligence and support overall compliance with the act and applicable regulations. More than just compliance though, proactive health and safety will help build the business credibility. It'll help foster trust with staff, with clients, with contractors, and really help to position these

new firms to be more competitive in the marketplace. If you're entering the construction sector, early engagement with health and safety resources really doesn't become just a check in the box. It's really much more of a critical business decision to support growth and the long-term success of your business overall.

**Maren Gamble:**

Amazing. Definitely, Deb, I have asked a construction health and safety expert that question, and I appreciate your response on that.

Now, for Dave and Deb, you've recorded five episodes so far in this video series. Can you give our podcast listeners a preview of the types of topics that you cover in those and how those topics apply to the everyday realities of a new construction business?

**David Dametto:**

Yeah, we covered a lot in these five episodes, Maren, but it's all stuff that a new construction business is going to run into pretty quickly once they've started up. One of the first things we talk about is training what's actually required and what's going to make the biggest impact on their jobs. Next, we're going to talk about hazards. They come up real quick and they're different on every jobsite, but the key to these hazards is spotting them early, knowing how to deal with them, just so that that small business is not going to have a small problem turn into a big problem.

We get into policies and programs. This can sound a bit boring, but when you connect it to real situations, you see that having something clear and in place can actually save you a lot of time and stress when you're going down the road. Supervisors that these firms are going to have eventually, it's a big one. The whole idea of competency and what a competent person means, and where in that role that they have, and what their roles and responsibilities are to keeping their crews on the project safe.

We talk about legislation, but instead of just trying to quote laws, we try to explain what's really looking like on a day-to-day basis and what the laws mean to those construction businesses in their day-to-day work. At the end of the day, we want to take all these big, sometimes intimidating requirements and show them that they actually fit into their everyday reality of what these new firms are going to be facing when they're starting up and working on construction projects.

**Maren Gamble:**

Thanks, Dave. Your expertise on this certainly never disappoints either. I'm going to go back to Ken, I think, to ask, what are some of the most common questions or misconceptions you hear from new employers when it comes to occupational health and safety? Do the episodes tackle those head on?

**Ken Rayner:**

Absolutely. I just want to remind you, Maren, that I'm not the expert here. That's Deb and Dave. So you're just asking a regular everyday Joe, that's it. But yeah, so the questions that we've compiled to create this series has come directly from newly registered construction businesses with less than five employees. When you talk about those 10,000 new construction firms that join IHSA's membership

every year that register with the WSIB, they're starting out with one employee, two employees, maybe it's a family member, maybe it's a friend.

And so, they definitely want to do what's right. They want to protect these people that they know and that they care for. It's just a case of, how do I go about doing that? We've taken a lot of the questions from our small business team who does the outreach, that talk to thousands of these small businesses every year and guide them through our resources and our website, and all of the things that are available to them from IHSA. We've really pulled the series together from that information.

One, when you take a look at the first episode, Mandatory Training for Construction, there's so many training programs out there. A small business, what do they want to know? What is it? What's mandatory? What do I have to take to start? Help me cut through the noise and just point me in the direction so I can be compliant and I can do the right thing. From a hazard assessment, I think what we want to get clarity on and what we hear from small businesses is, well, do I always have to do one? If I only have a job that lasts two days, is it necessary for me to identify the hazards?

Absolutely. There's there's no "you don't have to if you have a project that only takes two days". The hazards still are there, and you still have to identify the hazards, and make the workers aware of them, and you still have to control the hazards so that you're going to protect those workers irrespective of the timeframe. Just again, providing clarity to these new businesses in terms of what do they need to do and how can they be compliant?

Building an occupational health and safety policy and a program to support it, the word program is not defined anywhere in the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA). So this series is providing these employers with direction in terms of what are the essential elements that should be in a program that will be able to support your policy as you grow your business.

From a competent-supervision standpoint, so important on any jobsite, as we know in any industry, but in particularly in construction where there's significant hazards and high-risk work, taking the ministry's *Supervisor Health and Safety Awareness in Five Steps* doesn't check off the box and say, "That's all I need to know. I don't need any more training." That should just start you. Really, that should open your eyes to, "Oh wow, there's a lot more that I need to know." And certainly, turning to IHSA with all the free resources we have for supervisors to help them achieve compliance and become competent, we can certainly help them down that path.

Then that one piece where we certainly... Nobody wants it to happen, but preparing for an incident. As Deb Moskal said, I've heard her say this many times, 9-1-1 is not a rescue plan. You've got someone dangling from a harness and a lanyard and they're an excruciating pain saying, "Hey, hang on there. emergency responders will be here soon." That's not a rescue plan. Ensuring that there's clarity on all the things that are really mandatory to do as you start your construction business, that's how we've constructed, pardon the pun, this series.

It really has come again from questions that we've heard from construction companies with one to five employees who are reaching out to us and saying, "What do I need to do? And where's the information that I can utilize to make sure that I'm doing what's right?"

**Maren Gamble:**

Wow. Thanks, Ken. You and Dave both mentioned, you sort of alluded to something that I'd like to now turn it to Deb to dig into just a little bit deeper.

How in all of that did you decide on the must have content for these first five episodes? What made them the essential viewing for a firm starting out?

**Deb Moskal:**

Maren, it's a good point. Even in my previous answer where we talked about how it can seem overwhelming, and Dave and Ken had touched on this as well, it's trying to tailor down where do we need to start? When we were looking at developing the content for these episodes in the series, the goal for us was clear, and that was really to focus on the foundational elements that every construction firm would need to understand and implement to help them build that strong, compliant, safety-focused operation.

The topics that we came up with throughout the different episodes were selected because they were seen as being representative of the core building blocks for program development, due diligence, and most importantly, worker protection. Each of the episodes will address a critical area to form that essential starting point for the new employer who's entering the industry.

If we look at the mandatory training episode, we're digging into the minimum legal requirements for worker training and providing the emphasis on the importance of task-specific training. There's the two layers of training that we're analyzing in that episode. The episode really highlights that training needs to be tailored not only to the worker's role, but also to the specific tasks and environments they're going to encounter and work in.

Understanding and meeting those obligations is really a key component of both the compliance side of the business as well as effective risk management. When we talk about hazard assessment in episode two, we're viewing this as the fundamental piece to any safety program. In here, we explore how understanding the tasks that the workers perform, the environments in which they work forms the basis for identifying the hazards and the risks, and then implementing appropriate controls.

Hazard assessments being the foundation upon which the policies and the procedures are built, which is discussed in episode three. Training needs are determined, again, in episode one, and then incident response plans are formulated, which is the content of episode five. We talk about building the policy and program in our third episode. The goal here is really to send the message that a well-developed health and safety program and policy will set the clear expectations for the staff, establishes the roles and responsibilities, formalizes process such as inspection requirements, audit requirements and corrective actions.

The episode really walks through how to build an effective framework to support compliance, and foster that culture of accountability and continuous improvement within the organization. When we look at competent supervision, we look at the supervisor as playing a pivotal role to ensuring workplace safety and health for the workers. In the episode, we define and break down what it means to be a competent person under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* and explore the knowledge, training and experience required to help fulfill that definition with the goal of really helping to set supervisors up for success in their role.

The final episode gets into a topic that nobody wants to encounter, which is the workplace incident, and how do we prepare ourselves in the event that an incident occurs? We look at how to plan effectively so that if that incident does occur, the team is ready to respond. This includes a discussion on making sure appropriate procedures are in place, making sure that the necessary resources are available, and understanding what to do after the incident, so what are the reporting requirements as an example.

We stress it a lot in the episode, but once someone is hurt, it's too late to start planning, which really touches on what Ken said: 9-1-1 is not an emergency response plan. It's part of the plan, but we need to make sure that we are prepared to provide assistance to a worker in need until emergency services arrive. We saw these five episodes together as really representing the critical pillars of workplace health and safety.

And so, I think for new construction firms, addressing these areas early will help to fulfill legal obligations. I think it'll help them demonstrate due diligence and most importantly, help build that strong protection for workers. I think it's essential viewing for any firm who's laying the groundwork for a safe and successful future in the construction industry.

**Maren Gamble:**

That's amazing. I can really hear how the selection was made in the interest of setting firms up for success, which is the highest impact topics that could be found. I'm going to throw this back to Dave for the next question.

Dave, for a small construction firm that may be overwhelmed with getting jobs, clients, paperwork sorted, how can everything we've been talking about with these episodes make health and safety less intimidating and more achievable?

**David Dametto:**

Well, Maren, as a group, we understand that running a small construction business means that they've got their hands full. First, finding work, trying to keep clients happy, and stay on top of the paperwork, and it seems like endless paperwork, that goes along with running a small business. We know that with all this going on, it's not really a surprise that health and safety slips down the list.

With these episodes, we tried to keep things pretty straightforward. We didn't involve huge checklists or complicated systems. We just wanted to try to keep things simple that you can put forward into your day-to-day activities. Honestly, we tried to stress that good health and safety practices, procedures, policies aren't extra red tape. They can actually save you time. They can cut down on your stress. At the end, it shows the workers that you really care about their health and safety, and we're going to ensure that you're going to be in compliance with legislation. So trying to keep things straightforward for these small companies that are just starting out.

At the end of the day, our goal is to take the pressure off and show that it doesn't have to be overwhelming. It can be manageable for any business, even when you're juggling everything else. One of the things we try to stress is that IHSa has countless amounts of resources, whether it be consultants that they can speak to, whether it be downloads that they can look at our websites. Again, with these

broadcasts that we've been using, I think we've done that. We're here to help them. You're not on your own. We're able to get down and offer the help to these firms.

**Maren Gamble:**

Thanks, Dave. It almost gives me chills. That's just so in line with IHSA's mission, vision, and value statement. I think that just embodies the goal of our organization. I can really appreciate that perspective with this.

Deb, can you share an example of how the right safety practices learned early can prevent serious risks or costs for a new company down the road?

**Deb Moskal:**

Sure. As we said, the early days are really about laying the groundwork, not just for the operational growth, but for health and safety. If we can determine, and learn, and implement those practices from the beginning, we are positioning ourselves in a strong position for long-term success. We know that construction industry carries risk, which we discussed throughout the episodes, and without these proper systems in place, even small oversights can turn into serious incidents, costly delays, legal ramifications.

The early investment in health and safety really helps to mitigate these risks by helping with injury prevention, loss control, helping to ensure regulatory compliance, assisting with reputational awareness in the industry, and the potential awarding of contracts, reducing downtime, and an overall stronger safety culture. For new firms, getting it right from the beginning really does help protect our workers. It assists with making sure the business is strong and really helps us set that stage and foundation for long-term sustainable success.

**Maren Gamble:**

Amazing. Ken, I haven't talked to you in a while. I think I'll come back to our host extraordinaire because I understand that the episodes we've been talking about are free and available anytime at [ihsa.ca](http://ihsa.ca) and on YouTube. I'll also make sure to link those in the description for this podcast.

How can employers best use these resources as training tools, reference guides, or part of orientation?

**Ken Rayner:**

Okay. I'm going to go with D, all of the above, right, Maren? Maybe I could utilize your experience as somebody that was a health and safety manager of a small construction business and that had the responsibility of developing a program or a system for that business.

We tried to put ourselves in the shoes again of a small construction employer, and what do they need to know? And then how can we make it available to them? How can we make it easily accessible? How can we make it somewhat entertaining? But really, the education piece is more than the entertaining piece. That's why you see us with clipboards. This is an educational series that we're providing for those small business owners.

When you think back, Maren, to when you started building your program for the small construction firm that you were with, did you have anything like a series like this that you could have done from your own office that you could have watched over and over again, made notes, looked into some of the things that our experts are talking about? That resource really wasn't available back then, correct?

**Maren Gamble:**

One hundred per cent it wasn't. I would have used it nonstop because I found back then that I wanted to ask questions, but I didn't even know what questions to ask. A series like this, I would have watched it, re-watched it, and it would have helped me both learn things and understand what questions I needed to ask in my own workplace. I can appreciate the gap that this is filling.

**Ken Rayner:**

Well, I can appreciate too, you must have spent a significant amount of time just looking, trying to find resources in different spots that would address the questions that you were searching for. Even though you said you weren't certain asked even what questions you need to ask, but just to start looking, that must have taken you a significant amount of time.

Again, we're looking to make compliance easier for small business. The green book doesn't say if you have a new construction business with only a certain amount of employees, these things don't apply to you. You still have to protect the workers under your care. We really want to make these resources, again, available where they can be used any time, any place, and really highlighting all of the free resources that are available to these small business employers.

And so for me, I've said, "How would you use these tools?" If knowing what I know, I would sit down with a pen and a paper, and I would make notes as I'm watching each one of these videos from my home office, or my home, or my laptop, wherever I'm going to do it from, but I'm going to make notes and I'm going to take a lot of the guidance that Deb and Dave speak to and recommend. And I'm going to investigate into that more because as you said, you didn't necessarily know what questions to ask.

Well, Deb and Dave are giving you those topics. They're giving you those examples. They're providing you with that content. Now you have a better understanding of what you can look for. There's great ways to do that. Whether you're using search engines like Google or whether you're using an AI application like ChatGPT, if you're typing things in like, "How can I control this hazard?" And you're providing a description on what you're actually doing, in most cases, it's going to take you to the IHSA website and to those resources directly.

So use this as a means to be able to provide yourself with a greater understanding of your responsibilities as an employer and point you in... The series is intended to point you in that right direction so you can achieve compliance and that you can keep your workers safe.

**Maren Gamble:**

To that end, Ken, I understand that IHSA has also created a specific landing page with free or low-cost resources that accompanies the series. Can you share what employers can expect to find on that specific landing page?

**Ken Rayner:**

Absolutely, Maren. Great question. I'm really glad you asked that because we keep talking about free resources at IHSA, but if you go to [ihsa.ca](http://ihsa.ca), you're probably going to have to go to about 12 or 15 different sections to really get an understanding of what all of those free resources are. We're talking about the training that we have that is free to members.

Our *2-Minute News*, which is our e-newsletter that goes out that provides content and updates on legislation updates, and making sure that people are aware of what's happening and what's going on. The amount of products Dave mentioned earlier, we have products in print that members can order at no cost, like our *Safety Talks Manual*, our *Contractor's Toolkit*, but there's also a whole host of downloadable information that they don't have to wait to get it in the mail or by courier. They can download that information right away and start using it.

We've got eLearning courses that we provide to small businesses that's free of charge. Webinars. Our IHSA Health and Safety Magazine, it's a free subscription. This podcast, obviously we're putting it out on our podcast channel, but it's also available on most streaming services, Spotify, Apple Music. Then our safety talk videos on YouTube. There's all those resources that are available.

We want to make it easier for small business to find those resources, so we're going to compile them onto one page so that you can see everything very clearly and whatever is of interest to you, you can click on. Then again, looking to save you time. We want to be able to provide you direct access to the free resources, make it easier for you to find those resources to achieve compliance.

So again, Maren, if we can post the link on the podcast channel for people that are listening, then they'll be able to go directly to that page and then see those resources all in one spot.

**Maren Gamble:**

Thinking back again, you mentioned when I was starting out and the time it took to learn all the things and source the information, I remember doing what you're describing, finding resource websites and clicking through every link, and every sub-link, and every subpage, and the amount of time it took. And so, the idea of having this landing page that focuses it in as a starting point and as a portal, that's something that really does excite me for people starting out today that they can have available to them.

**Ken Rayner:**

Yeah. We appreciate you utilizing your experience. You've contributed to this in terms of yourself and other people like you who have gone through this before and said, "Hey, how can we do this better? How can we make it easier for small business as they're wanting to do the right thing? How do we make it easier for them to find those resources that they need to create that safe and healthy workplace and to be able to leverage them as quick as possible?" That's what we want to do. I'm glad that from someone like yourself, you're believing that this is something that'll be valuable to a new small business.

**Maren Gamble:**

Thanks, Ken. And speaking of someone like myself, I want to put Deb and Dave back on the spot and ask you guys, if you had one piece of advice for a new construction employer that's listening right now, something that will set them on the right path for health and safety success, what would that be?

**David Dametto:**

Well, for me, it would be let's not try to do everything at once. We've got to start small, pick one or two safety practices, safe procedure or tasks that your workers are going to do, and develop those safe work practices, safe job procedures, and be realistic on how you're going to get those things implemented.

Once they become routine, we're going to get into that next piece. We always talk about health and safety, it's like building a house. If you don't have a strong foundation, well, the walls are going to come down. The foundations for your health and safety management system, keeping your workers safe, is those safe work practices, safe job procedures.

You want to involve your workers in developing these things. When a worker feels that they're part of the process, they're going to be more likely to buy in and they're going to be able to help you keep things on track. We always talk about health and safety. It's not just about enforcing the rules. It's about people working together to make sure that everyone goes home safe at the end of the day.

If we can start off small, let's take small little bites and we'll be able to move forward as an organization and get our health and safety management system working. So take it slow.

**Maren Gamble:**

I love that advice. Deb, do you have anything to add to that one?

**Deb Moskal:**

I think I would just reiterate what Dave said. I think for me, a big part of it is making sure that the workers are involved in the process. If the workers feel like they're part of the process, they get to give their opinion. They're the ones doing the task in all reality. Who better than to involve in the process for your hazard assessments for practice and procedure development than those that are on the tools, those that are doing the tasks?

Get them to weigh in, get them to be part of the process and that should really help with their buy-in and they're wanting to make sure each other are safe, and get home in the same condition they left for work in the morning.

**Maren Gamble:**

I think, Ken, I want to come to you for the last question before we sign off this podcast. We've touched on this throughout the episode, but I'd like to ask you for the final question, why should every new construction firm take the time to watch these episodes and how do you hope it impacts Ontario's construction industry in the bigger picture overall?

**Ken Rayner:**

Yeah, thanks for throwing the last question my way, Maren. The first thing, why would a newly registered construction business want to invest time in watching this? Well, I would even... I know I've continually said new, but I want to make sure it's also clear that if you have a construction business, and you've had it up and running for five years, and you feel that you need help, absolutely leverage this series.

**Maren Gamble:**

Good point.

**Ken Rayner:**

We're really intending it for newly registered firms because as they start out, we know that we're providing them with clarity in terms of what they need to do, but any small construction business can make use of these resources.

Probably for the most important reason is that between David Dametto and Deborah Moskal, they have over 50 years of practical experience in construction health and safety in Ontario. They both started in the construction industry before coming to IHSA, so they've done a lot of the jobs that these newly registered firms or these small businesses that have been around for a little while are doing today and will be doing tomorrow.

Dave and Deb have done that work. They understand what these businesses go through and they're providing their expertise through this free resource that, if you had to put a price tag on it, it's going to be a couple of thousand dollars' worth of investment from Dave and Deb coming into your business and providing this information to you directly. To me, that's a great reason to do it.

How can this really impact small businesses? Well, I don't believe there's such a tool as this today. I think at IHSA, we've identified a gap that when you have a newly registered business, we need to create these type of resources, again so that we can help them achieve compliance when it's convenient for them, not when it's convenient for us. And so, we want to continue to develop these tools.

For anybody that's listening, if you are a small business, make use of these resources. If you're not a small business, but you know someone that has them, please pass this information along to them because it's going to help them set a strong foundation for creating a safe and healthy workplace, which we hope as they grow their business, because if they're establishing a strong foundation for occupational health and safety, most likely other aspects of their business are going to improve as well.

Retention of employees and possibly customer satisfaction because of the jobs getting done with no issues, and they'll continue to grow their business and they've started on a really strong foundation. As we know, anytime we want to build a house, we want to build it with a strong foundation. As you build your business, utilizing these tools to establish a really strong foundation to be able to move forward, I think is going to help those businesses in the future and help them today.

I'm really excited to be able to launch this in 2026, provide this information to these new businesses, but also small businesses that have been around for a while to help them just really cut through the fog and make sure there's clarity in terms of what they need to do.

**Maren Gamble:**

Thanks, Ken.

With that, thank you for listening to our episode on IHSA's video series, *Ask a Construction Health and Safety Expert* with Deb Moskal and David Dametto. If you have any questions about our podcasts or suggestions for topics you'd like us to cover, please reach out to us at [podcast@ihsa.ca](mailto:podcast@ihsa.ca).

As always, be sure to like and subscribe on your podcast channel and visit us at [ihsa.ca](http://ihsa.ca) for all your health and safety needs.

**Announcer:**

The *IHSA Safety Podcast*. For more episodes, tips, and all things safety, go to [ihsasafetypodcast.ca](http://ihsasafetypodcast.ca).  
Thanks for listening.