



**Ken Rayner:**

In Ontario workplaces, the intention is clear. Every worker should go home healthy and safe at the end of every workday, but that doesn't happen by luck or good fortune. Workplaces that are healthy and safe are planned, structured, and built deliberately. And that's what we're here to talk about on today's episode.

**Announcer:**

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

**Ken Rayner:**

Welcome to the *IHSA Safety Podcast*. I'm your host, Ken Rayner. Today, we're talking about how Ontario employers can begin building effective occupational health and safety management systems through WSIB's Health and Safety Excellence Program, and how it helps employers take a structured, practical approach to health and safety. Not just to meet requirements, but to build systems that grow and improve over time. And joining me for this conversation are two of IHSA's experts on this topic, Maren Gamble and Chris McKean. Welcome to you both. Great to have you here.

**Chris McKean:**

Thanks, Ken.

**Maren Gamble:**

Great to be here.

**Chris McKean:**

Good to be here.

**Ken Rayner:**

Let's start off maybe in terms of why we felt this topic was important. Chris and Maren, we talked about how this could be a particularly good fit for companies with six or more employees, or perhaps those companies that are growing and are going to be up to six or more employees in the next little while. Why do we agree this topic was very important for them in particular?

**Chris McKean:**

We've got a big membership. IHSA's membership is over 160,000 firms. Most of them are that size or smaller, and some are getting ready to grow. And so we're gearing the podcast to them, these small businesses. There's so many of them in our membership, and they have a large range of safety knowledge that we want to help them with as well. So maybe not the ones that are brand new to health and safety and aren't sure about even basic rights and responsibilities in the workplace, but more towards these smaller businesses that are newer to safety, they know something about it and might be interested in how to take what they've already got and kick started in the right direction. We're doing a few things, but what's next? And then you move into those businesses that are a little further along. We got a first aid program, we got a return-to-work program.

Also, what's next? And I think at the other end of the spectrum, we've got some that are looking to get their people more involved and aspiring to hit a goal, maybe to get certified to a standard down the road. So I think those are just a few great reasons why we're talking about the Health and Safety Excellence Program today. Any thoughts there, Mar?

**Maren Gamble:**

Well said, Chris, first off. And I think one of the reasons we wanted to do this podcast is because the three of us talk about this group a ton, just amongst the three of us in everyday life. And one of the reasons this group of employers comes up so much is that a lot of them are at this critical point in their journey as a business where you're looking forward to moving from individual sites where you might be running the entire enterprise yourself. You're there, you're doing everything, it's your vision, it's your direct control over health and safety. And you're looking forward to where that's starting to potentially expand to two, three, more sites. Growth is certainly a goal that we would respect and see at a lot of businesses. And that's this critical point where you're moving from being able to control it as an individual and needing to establish some formalized consistency to be able to maintain the good practices that you may have been able to directly oversee in the past.

It's a very critical point in time that we talk about these groups a lot. And this is why actually the three of us have decided that we're going to dedicate two episodes to talking to this group. This exciting one today is about the Health and Safety Excellence Program, but we know there's a wealth of knowledge. So there'll be a second podcast that I'm teasing right now coming up later for this group as well.

**Ken Rayner:**

And we've touched on, Maren, not so long ago, we did a podcast episode about the Ask a Construction Health and Safety Expert.

**Maren Gamble:**

Yeah.

**Ken Rayner:**

Very foundational, very much suited for those employers and companies that are just starting out. So if we use the phrase crawl, walk, and run as a means of progression, we were starting with the Ask a

Construction Health and Safety Expert. That's the crawl stage, let's say. I think what we're going to talk about today, Maren and Chris, is how do we get employers migrating over to the walking stage so that they can, if they so choose, can move to the run stage down the road in that progression. But we're really wanting to get into that walk stage today and how do you get there? And then what do you do when you're there and how do you build it? So Chris, let me ask you this. What would you be hoping that our membership who's listening to this podcast at the end of the podcast, what are you hoping that they... What's the message or what's the learnings that you hope that they get from this episode?

**Chris McKean:**

I think the program's been around for about seven to eight years. And so maybe three take-homes, because it's been around for a while, flexible program. It meets your needs, what you need, not the other way around. There's really, really high engagement in Ontario. So I'll talk a little bit about that and then outcomes, right?

So maybe the roots of the program, first message. Second is what engagement's been looking like. Third, what outcomes are looking like. So again, the program was built about seven or eight years ago, and it breaks safety down into bite-sized topics. So it makes it manageable, easier to work on for workplaces. You select what works for you. There's a lot of flexibility in this program. There's over 40 topics you can choose from. You don't have to do them all. You pick what works for you. It's a really flexible program and it's based on your needs.

It's a popular program. So from an engagement standpoint, the one thing that's unique about this, in a few short years, there were over a million Ontarians that were being engaged and touched by this program through workplace participation. So really high engagement early on, and it's due to a few things. It's due in part to the provider network that they built. WSIB built the program, but in order to access the 300,000 registered firms across Ontario through WSIB, you need to have partners in health and safety. And what they did was they developed a provider network. Like IHSA, we're a provider and we become your expert in safety that can help our membership navigate the program. So really, you're never alone when you're navigating this program. I think it's also helpful that the insurance rebates in this program are nothing like I've ever seen before in my career.

There have been incentive and rebate programs in the past where employers could get some of their insurance premiums back from the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, WSIB. Now with this program, an employer can get 200 per cent their insurance premiums back. So just to give you an example, there's a signing bonus as well.

**Maren Gamble:**

And it's real. That's the thing. It does almost sounds unbelievable. This is real.

**Chris McKean:**

And if the company, let's say they have a \$10,000 insurance premiums with Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, depending on the number of topics they pick and complete in a year, they can actually get up to \$20,000 back. So that's \$21,000 on a \$10,000 annual insurance premium. Ontario's never done anything like this before, right? So that's been a great addition to the program. And just I think one last

thing in terms of outcomes with regards to these rebates, we're a provider. And since the start of the Excellence Program to the end of last year, I just say alone, we've helped our members receive more than 12 million back in insurance rebates. It's something we've never done in the past. We've accomplished it through previous rebate programs in the past through the Workplace Safety Insurance Board, but certainly that took many, many, many more years.

**Ken Rayner:**

We've talked about a lot of the free programs that IHSA offers as some of the best kept secrets in occupational health and safety in Ontario. But the Health and Safety Excellence Program from WSIB, I think hands down has to be the best kept secret in the province. Even though Chris, you said, going back a couple years, WSIB had advised that they had over... The workplaces that were involved in the program represented more than a million workers across Ontario. So we know it's prevalent, we know it's out there, but boy, there should be lineups around the corner for each of the providers for employers wanting to get into this program, being that it helps them create structure. And while they're doing that, they have an ability to be able to generate significant incentives and rebates back to them to help offset the cost of what they're doing.

It's truly an amazing program. So let's keep talking about this amazing program. Maren, maybe let's get into some terms that we're going to be using today to make sure everybody's on the same page. So I think when employers or workers hear the term occupational health and safety management system, which is a mouthful in itself...

**Maren Gamble:**

It is.

Ken Rayner:

...Can absolutely sound overwhelming. Maren, from your experience, what does it really mean in plain language?

**Maren Gamble:**

Yeah, it's a good question, Ken, because you talked about HSEP as a secret, which is HSEP is the acronym for Health and Safety Excellence program. So HSEP. You might hear us say that throughout this podcast a lot. One of the reasons that people might end up sort of looking at the program and getting a little bit overwhelmed or nervous about it is probably some of this language like occupational health and safety management system, stuff that seems formal, potentially intimidating, especially for a firm that is somewhere near the beginning of their health and safety journey. So I think it is important for us to talk about what do these really mean, because it's not a scary thing, even though it is a mouthful. So often we talk about it as an acronym, so I'm going to throw this out there in case we do it throughout this podcast as the OHSMS, which isn't really much easier to say than the full thing.

But the occupational health and safety management system, it's a somewhat abstract term that's hard to pin down. It is defined in the Act in terms of health and safety management system, but what if that still doesn't make sense to you in real life? I felt like that too for a very long time, even after my own

specialty started being announced as OHSMS. So I figured it's important to tell people my own thoughts on what this can look like practically for a company in various parts of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* in Ontario. The language in there mentions things like a policy, a program, and then there's the health and safety management system.

For me personally, I like to use a visual to help me relate these concepts to one another because they do relate to one another in terms of how you might use them. So, like many health and safety visuals in the past, in my mind, it's a triangle, small at the top, bigger at the base. At the top of my triangle is the policy itself because the policy is just a single document, single powerful document, but it's a document that outlines the commitment from a company's management to occupational health and safety. This forms the what that is going to be done by the company to keep people healthy and safe. It's a big deal in this one single place to say, "What are we committed to with our company?"

It doesn't get into the "how" that's going to be accomplished yet. For the how, I add my next layer going down the triangle, gets a little bigger. This one's also full of documents, and this one's the program. It's a much bigger collection of documents than the one policy statement, and it outlines the how that the company plans to achieve their commitment to health and safety.

But at this point, we've got this fairly short triangle that's really about documents existing. For me, that's where we take that next step to the biggest layer yet, which is at the bottom, and that's where you'll find the occupational health and safety management system. It includes everything above it, the policy, the program, the procedures, but it's bigger than that because now it's going to factor in all the stuff about how things actually happen.

This includes evaluating the effectiveness of all those outlined documents that talk about how. This includes processes for continual improvement. It includes identifying gaps. It ensures that training is done, but also that it's adequate for what people need. This includes all the feedback that allows us to continue to make the program documents better. It's the real life of health and safety in the workplace when all the documents, records, and the people come together in that setting.

**Ken Rayner:**

That's a great description of it, Maren. Very, very clear. I appreciate that. Chris, maybe we could get into with you, Maren touched on the how piece, right?

**Chris McKean:**

Sure.

**Ken Rayner:**

So that's a big lever. How does WSIB's Health and Safety Excellence Program help employers approach what we've been talking about in a structured way? So how do they invoke that how with the Health and Safety Excellence Program?

**Chris McKean:**

It's very formalized and it's very purposeful and there's partners in it. So there's a lot of structure and direction with this program to get employers to feel comfortable about using this program. And I'll just maybe give a few examples.

So in terms of the structure, so there's very specific topics that the employer can pick based on their needs. I told you about the flexibility of the program. So for example, participation. There's a topic called participation. Many employers already have their people participate in health and safety, right? Meetings, inspections, conversations, trying to figure out how to make jobs safer. And so HSEP, the Health and Safety Excellence Program just helps them formalize these conversations and some of the things that they're doing. So put down what you're doing. So this topic, participation, put down what you're already doing and compare it to the requirements of that topic.

The participation topic literally has documented requirements, I'll say almost like a checklist, for that topic. And I think many employers are surprised that they're actually already doing the right things when they do that side by side. The requirements just help you fill in the gaps of what you might be missing. So there's a lot of structure contained within the requirements of each individual topic. And also from a scheduling standpoint and hitting milestones working with the provider network, so for example, us, IHSA, we help keep employers on that annual schedule as well.

So topics are typically completed in a year. So there's certain checkpoints that are pre-established throughout the year to set them up for success, to keep them moving along. And I think most specifically, if I can refer to, is the quarterly rebate schedule. There's four rebates a year and what we help employers do is work-back from those rebates to establish milestones to set for success at validation, being successful at getting those rebates.

So more structure, even around the topics and the levels that help companies mature and progress. So participation is one of the foundational topics. There's about 10 of them. As the employer progresses through these and safety starts to mature a little more within their workplace, they pick out more and more topics that meet their needs. And the structure of this program is, as you accomplish a few and you choose more topics, it helps you move along. I guess it helps you move along that continuum of your maturity of health and safety within the workplace.

So as the employer progresses through these topics, safety starts to mature. They pick topics to meet their needs to keep on moving, like controlling the hazards in your workplace, maybe developing a return to work program, maybe even auditing your whole program, if that's your goal. So you can start at participation and maybe even work up to a return to work program and auditing the whole program in itself. And we're here. The providers are here to help the employer along every step in the program. So they're not alone, we're your partner in the program as well as WSIB.

**Maren Gamble:**

You said something interesting there. I thought, Chris, we often talk about how this allows that structured formal approach, which is true. That's absolutely real. But even those words can be a little bit intimidating if you're new to health and safety. So you used another word that really struck me and you said purposeful. And I think that's a really key piece of this message here is that yes, there's a structure and there's a formality to what this is. But more than that, for each company, the development is purposeful.

So if you are that brand new company that we were talking about earlier that's maybe still in that crawling and there's other resources, there may still be a couple topics you want to look at because there may be some purposeful initiation at the beginning, basic level that you want to get into. But really as you develop, and one of the reasons we identified sort of our key demographic is that company being ready for growth, you can very purposefully identify what you need now.

Because I find that there's a lot of organizations who actually struggle to get started in health and safety. The hardest part is often just getting into it, and there's so much out there. How do I even know what I don't know? I feel like we're pretty safe. We talk about it. We care about it. I care about my employees. There's so much what do I do? And that's why the purposefulness, I don't know if that's a word, but here we go, of this program is so beautiful because it gives firms access to those OHSMS specialists who can help talk them through and identify what's actually missing for them.

And even more than what's missing, the biggest thing I think that they do is they help prioritize where to start within what's missing. Because it's one thing to say, okay, I would like to have all of these things. It's another thing to say, "What do I need tomorrow? What do I need by next year? What would I like to have eventually?" And so I really think that the excellence program and access to that specialized knowledge and someone to talk it through, giving you that opportunity to prioritize, identify, but prioritize your needs gives you that ability to take it in steps, to truly walk towards that run that we're talking about in a way that you're not stumbling, you're not going the wrong way, you're not losing your footing, you've really got that stable ground to start your journey from.

**Chris McKean:**

It's very unique.

**Ken Rayner:**

You're just comparing it to something outside of occupational health and safety. So you think about going on a journey, and this is a journey for a lot of employers in terms of from where they're starting out to where they want to be end goal. And so if I think of planning a trip to, say, Egypt, let's say, there's two ways I can go about doing it. I could go about doing it and just sort of get myself over to Cairo and take a cab from the airport and just go explore on my own and try and figure things out.

And it may work out fine. It may be a great experience. Or I could have a very structured, guided tour and utilize resources that are over there that know the food, that know all of the tourist destinations, the Pyramids, the Sphinx, all of those type of things that you'd want to be able to go see and encounter, the places you'd want to go in Cairo. You can go about it very structured. The fun thing about that, going the guided route and then talking about the Health and Safety Excellence Program is you put your money into the guided program and then you get double the money back at the end.

**Maren Gamble:**

Right. This is where it...

**Ken Rayner:**

Which would be amazing if you want a guided tour and you got all of your money back.

**Maren Gamble:**

How is this real? But it is.

**Ken Rayner:**

Exactly.

**Chris McKean:**

I'm getting paid to go to Cairo?

**Ken Rayner:**

That would be something, wouldn't it?

**Chris McKean:**

You know that makes me think of Phil? Phil? Ken. Last night, Jen and I were re-watching Somebody Feed Phil on Netflix, right? So I don't know if you guys have seen that at all, but it's...

**Ken Rayner:**

I have not.

**Chris McKean:**

Phil Rosenthal, you know who Phil Rosenthal is? He's the old producer for Everybody Loves Raymond. And you learn through this show that he actually wrote, Everybody Loves Raymond based on him, him and his family, his terrible relationship with his brother, this awkward relationship with his parents, et cetera, et cetera.

So he's created a docuseries, it's called Everybody Feed Phil on Netflix and he travels the world, went to Egypt experiencing their culture, experiencing their food. And what he does is the crew and he, they don't just land there and go, "Let's get started." He has guides. He has people who know the culture. He has people who know all the food. And last night we saw the one on Mumbai and the main drag that they were on, he's like, "If I didn't have you as a tour guide," somebody he'd met in the past, it's a friend, "I would've never come down the street. I would've never experienced these foods. I'd be too nervous to do it on my own."

**Ken Rayner:**

Absolutely. But we can apply the same thing to, certainly, and it's a great example to use, Chris, because we can apply the same thing to an occupational health and safety management system, building it. You really haven't gone down the road, let's say, of hazard assessments and really have an understanding on how to do it. You can go about doing it yourself and you may end up in a place where you're happy in the end and go, "Hey, I think I was able to accomplish a lot on my own." Or you can turn to experts, you can turn to utilize resources, trusted resources that can really make sure that you are experiencing all of

the things that you should be encountering when you go down that road of hazard assessment and making sure that all those things are checked.

**Maren Gamble:**

That's a fabulous point because what that gives you is confidence that you're doing all the things you want to do while you're there. And I think the same is also applying to health and safety management systems is going through something that is fairly purposeful and you have the guide and you have the help, it allows you to have confidence in your end result, that it is truly accomplishing what you want it to accomplish, that it doesn't just feel like it does, and maybe it is, but you have the confidence to know that it is. And I think that's a big difference that for me, that's a fundamental value to building your system like this and building a framework that's formalized.

**Ken Rayner:**

So Maren, let's go back to something you were talking about, and maybe we can expand upon this because I think this is an important part. And Maren, you've got both your experience in industry and the construction industry and being at IHSA in various positions dealing with occupational and safety management systems. So where do organizations who are just starting off on that journey, where do they often encounter the most struggles?

**Maren Gamble:**

Honestly, the most struggles tend to be just in getting started. So we talked before about prioritizing where to start, figuring out where to start, but it does go beyond that as well. And I will take a moment, shout out to the Ask an Expert with Deb Moskal and David Dametto because they do go through some really great information on this as well, when they talk about the idea that starting a system also doesn't mean throwing out everything that you've ever done. It doesn't mean changing fundamentally what you're doing in everything. It doesn't mean trying to put on the identity of someone else.

A lot of the time what it means is you've got a company that's made up of individuals up until this point and probably great individuals who are bringing all kinds of knowledge, who are establishing your procedures, they're establishing your protocols, and they're keeping your company moving smoothly on a day-to-day basis. What this is and what we're starting, one of the biggest hurdles is, is recognizing that that is huge value and you keep that. What we're doing is formalizing that so that as you grow, as you bring in new individuals, maybe individuals leave, you can consistently maintain those fabulous pieces of knowledge, that fabulous experience that you have and not lose it.

We want a company to continually expand its knowledge base and never have that knowledge base step back because they've lost a person in terms of their employees. So to get started in the process, one of the biggest things, beyond just fundamentally taking the first step, is to shake the feeling that you need to change who you are. A lot of the time it's just building on all that good stuff because who you are is great.

**Ken Rayner:**

I love it. So let's not throw out the crawl stage that you've gone through for whatever period of time that is. There were some learnings there, there were possibly some habits that have been built that maybe are just verbal, but needs to be documented. Chris, I've heard you say that so many times, that many companies out there are doing all the right things, they just have to document it.

Chris, let's move to maybe a little bit more about how everybody at an organization contributes to this, because this is not on the shoulders of the health and safety team. This is, really to put this in place and to put it in place effectively, it needs everybody working together. And I believe WSIB's Health and Safety Excellence Program places a lot of early emphasis on both leadership commitment, but also worker participation. So from your perspective, how does that full company involvement from the newest worker to the person in charge of everything, how does that contribute to the success of building an effective system?

**Chris McKean:**

Great question. I think in two words, you could say it, teamwork and culture, that's at a thousand feet. It starts at the top. It involves everyone. That's how you build the Internal Responsibility System. But when you talk about teamwork and culture, culture involves a shared set of values within the company, right? And everyone's safety, which is very important, but when it's very evident that that's a shared value within the organization, your levels of trust really start to go up. And when that happens, then you're getting to the point where you're not just training people to identify hazards, you're empowering them to make recommendations on how to control them, which may make the workplace safe for them and their colleagues and the people that they work with. They do the job, they know how it works best.

Leadership taking these recommendations and implementing them, so showing that they're empowering people, they trust their recommendations, at that point, everybody's got skin in the game, right? So that's kind of at the granular level. And then when you kind of get to the macro level of establishing goals and objectives every year, it all rolls up, right? You're gathering all this information from your people to establish goals on an annual basis. And because it's coming from the people, again, that's the skin in the game, right? And people will follow that course because they've been involved in setting it.

So when I say teamwork and culture, believe it or not, there's actually a culture survey in the Health and Safety Excellence Program. I recommend this all the time. When you start the program, get a baseline of your culture. It's not hard to do the survey. I think it's about 13 to 15 questions. There's your baseline. Stay in it for a few years and maybe on a regular basis, it doesn't have to be the first year, maybe two years. Take that culture survey, see how things are changing, improving, or maybe some things that need help still. And believe it or not, just with this question, Ken, about leadership commitment or worker participation, they're actually topics in the program. So there's the structure in the program behind all of this to help you build this.

**Maren Gamble:**

Ken, even just when you were asking the question, it was bringing me back a little bit, a couple of years there. The idea that health and safety can't do this alone, I think it can't be stated enough. I have experience working in COR® audits and I have experience working in the Health and Safety Excellence Program from IHSA's side. And the experience that I have, you can really see it as a consultant when you

come into the company, when you have a health and safety person who's trying to do it all themselves versus a company where there's full engagement through the entire organization. You can feel it pretty much right away. And when it rests primarily with health and safety, it is a much, much harder journey than if it didn't because health and safety can write documents. They can do that. They're probably really good at it.

But when I was talking about the system, you remember when I went to that third layer, when we were actually going into a health and safety management system, it involves the people. It involves what it's doing on the job site. It involves a much bigger picture than just writing documents. So that's something that health and safety can't force. That requires management to make it a piece of everything. That requires workers to have a say in what those documents actually contain so that we know they work for them. And so a lot of the systems that are very, very driven solely by a health and safety individual or department end up stuck in very procedural document space and have, I don't want to say it's impossible, but a very, very hard time moving to that system integrated piece because involvement of people is fundamental to what a system is.

**Chris McKean:**

Maren, I was on a jobsite recently and with a site super and he approached a couple workers. And the question was about, it was an ergonomics question. And they asked the question and the workers just took it from there. Talking about the pre-job assessment that they did, why they'd implemented a certain control. They knew there were limitations to the controls. They must have gone on for about five, 10 minutes. And at the end, the site super looked at me, said, "Job well done." It was incredible, but that's a great example, right?

**Maren Gamble:**

That's fabulous. As a health and safety person, I obviously love that. It gives me chills. But if I was the business owner, I would love that too because look at people taking care of themselves, taking care of each other, owning the system. However many people are employed in your company, that many heads is better than one. So that's fabulous. That's a great example.

**Ken Rayner:**

And Chris, you talk about going onto a worksite. The leadership commitment and worker participation from a visual perspective, I think the one that jumps out for me the most is that person in charge of your company, she or he, whoever that is coming to the worksite, are they coming to the worksite dressed in the appropriate PPE as every single worker has to be wearing on that jobsite? Or are they coming in dress clothes and not changing into the PPE and just walking around the site because they're the person in charge and saying, "I can get away with that." To me, that's a big one when it comes to, if you want to demonstrate leadership commitment, you have to do as everybody else does and walk the walk. And from a worker participation standpoint, you want workers to participate, you demonstrate as a leader that you are also committed to the system and that it applies to you just as much as it applies to the newest person that works on that jobsite, that's going to send a really strong message.

**Maren Gamble:**

Absolutely. And if you think they're not noticing and they're not talking about it, I'll tell you right now you're wrong. They are and they are.

**Ken Rayner:**

So we've talked about the crawl, the walk, and the run. So let's talk about the walk stage. And maybe as the employer, that firm is going through their journey through the Health and Safety Excellence Program and are now walking and starting to pick up the pace with that walk, let's say, what could be those next steps as the company nears completion of the Health and Safety Excellence Program, all the topics, what could they be looking at then to move into the run stage?

**Maren Gamble:**

One of the beautiful things about the Health and Safety Excellence Program is that it's 41 topics big. I think Chris maybe mentioned earlier that it is that big. That's a lot of topics to choose from. And I don't say that to be overwhelming. I say that to mention how well broken down this is, to be able to choose exactly what interests your company. So it's really never too soon or too late for someone to explore whether there's a good fit for them in the Excellence Program because it really goes from those truly fundamental topics like management commitment when I talked about the policy statement, that kind of space, all the way through to very advanced topics that firms might want to work on. So everybody's journey in each step looks different. They might start in it and be continually in it for an extended period of time.

They may start in it, start and stop, come back a few years later. They did a few. They're going to live in that space, come back when they're walking a little faster. They might do one topic, they might do 41 topics. Being real, most firms, it's somewhere between 1 and 41. Those are definitely at the end of our distribution, but it really is tailored to a company's journey. And in that next step, it's really when you're starting to move through the Excellence Program, thinking about where do I want to be? It's that 5 and 10 year plan kind of concept. What do I want my company to be able to do? We can start talking about things that might come after each step. When you've done the topics that you want to do and you're looking to take an even bigger step. And this is where I'm going to mention another scary word, which is audit.

And so audit can be... I know. I know audit can scare us all. It sounds like a very intimidating thing that you actually want to avoid, not seek out. But I'm here to tell you that when it comes to health and safety, when you've taken those steps to move through your development systematically, I talked about having that confidence before. You're moving through with the supportive experts, looking at everything, you're exploring what's a good fit for your actual company. You're checking whether things have actually been successful in implementation and making changes if they haven't. You're in a perfect position to move to a health and safety audit as a celebration. It's really your graduation. If you're thinking about doing some sort of education, you've done the tests, you've taken the courses, you've submitted all the assignments, now you're ready to go through that process to graduate and to have that certificate to put on the wall.

There's a couple different options in terms of audits that are out there that might suit your organization. Certainly people might have heard of the Certificate of Recognition, COR® audit. They may have heard of the ISO 45001 audit. There are choices out there. And the beautiful thing about HSEP because it is

purposeful, as Chris said, and it is company driven and it's exactly what you want it to be, is you can be using that HSEP program looking forward to those next steps and making sure that you arrive in a confident position to be able to be recognized for the journey that you've gone through by the time you're running on this journey.

**Ken Rayner:**

And when you're running, Chris, definitely when you're walking, there are significant business benefits that employers can realize by joining and participating in WSIB's Health and Safety Excellence Program. And we've touched on this a bit. We haven't made this the selling point of this episode to say, "This is all the money that you can realize by joining this program because obviously believing there are greater benefits than just the rebate you get." But Chris, the dollar amounts that I know from IHSA's perspective that we help companies that are in the program that we administer on behalf of WSIB are really significant. Do you want to just talk about that? Because I think from a sheer size perspective, it would be very surprising for many of our listeners.

**Chris McKean:**

To your point, we've talked about the rebates. We've talked a bit about culture. And I think if I can focus on the state of the industry a bit, drill down from there. And when I say the state of the industry, I was at the Ontario Road Builders' Association Conference, their annual conference back in February, and there was a panel discussion on the state and the industry in terms of human capital. Ontario is at a point where contractors are competing to get people. Finding people, you talk to any contractors these days, finding people and keeping them is really, really hard. The pool is small. The contractors sometimes end up poaching, not on purpose, but it just happens. They're basically taking somebody from one contractor to another. With the competition like that, the one gave a great explanation of the benefits of being just a leader at everything.

And it was the CEO of Capital Paving. In a world of competing for people to work for your company, you have to attract them. You want to attract the best. How do you attract the best? You have to be the best. Get out there and win the industry awards. Be the paver of the year. Get out there and get recognized for health and safety excellence. Get certified to a national or an international standard. When you do these things and people are looking for work, if they want to know that they're working for a great company that keeps their people safe, you get picked as an employer for these people to come and interview. And if you're fortunate enough that it works out and they apply and they get the job, when they see that strong culture that's already there, the retention's high. So I think from the business standpoint, from a human capital standpoint, it's really about you do these things within your organization, you're going to attract the right people to your organization.

And once you get them in, they're going to stay. I think at about a thousand feet, that's a really good business benefit of taking a managed and structured approach to health and safety. I could get much more granular beyond that, but just wanted to start there. Maybe Maren, if you've got a few comments as well.

**Maren Gamble:**

I think that's a really important one in terms of the business benefits. The only other thing I would add is that when you have this structured systematic approach and you know, like I was saying, the feedback loops and continual improvement, that doesn't just improve safety, that improves process, that improves efficiency, that improves communication, that improves all kinds of these important fundamentals that are business fundamentals. They're not just health and safety fundamentals. In terms of business benefits, when you have this structured system, you have confidence in what everyone is doing, when they're doing it, and who they're communicating it to, it really makes doing the work easier, not just doing the health and safety easier.

**Ken Rayner:**

I'm really happy that you guys went down that road of the business benefits. I started off by saying, "Let's talk about the cash. How much cash they getting back? The tens of millions of dollars." And you gave an answer that was much more tangible. So I appreciate you pivoting on that and really providing something of greater substance because yes, you can generate rebates and they are significant. Those business benefits that both of you just spoke about to me are trump, trump that because you're building now something that is sustainable moving forward and that's going to help you for years to come as opposed to a one-time paycheck or rebate. So I'm glad. Thanks for... That was a great answer.

**Chris McKean:**

Just one other sustainability item that I was thinking about if I could for a minute. Joint ventures. Joint ventures are really common in our membership and the construction industry. And sometimes they're done to help companies grow into a marketplace that they haven't been before. Look at the economy these days. Certain sectors are struggling. Contractors have to pivot and move into other sectors and sometimes for joint ventures. Like any relationship, companies typically gravitate towards ones that share their values. Demonstrating that commitment to safety through the Excellence Program, it really ups the game for a company's profile when considering options for JV and essentially can help open the doors to new markets.

**Ken Rayner:**

Absolutely. And that's a great segue way, Chris, into the next question I wanted to ask, which is, so you and I have been working together for quite a few years in advocating to public buyers of construction, in particular in Ontario, such as municipalities, regions, and organizations like Metrolinx, Infrastructure Ontario, as a couple examples to require, as a prerequisite, a certified occupational health and safety management system from those that are bidding on the projects they fund. And I'm confident that the Health and Safety Excellence Program can help prepare those companies that want to get into that work. That one, as you said, we need to pivot because perhaps in residential construction right now, we're not seeing as much opportunity. Let's pivot into ICI, institutional and commercial, and...

**Chris McKean:**

Industrial.

**Ken Rayner:**

...Industrial, thank you. How does the Health and Safety Excellence Program help prepare those companies that want to pivot and move into these areas where public buyers have complex projects and they want to ensure that everything's going to be done healthy and safe. How does that WSIB Health and Safety Excellence Program help those that want to pivot, Chris?

**Chris McKean:**

When you look at these buyers that you mentioned that require certifications to various standards, whether it's the COR® standard or ISO standards, when the Excellence Program was born, it was the birth child of taking a system and smashing it up into as many small pieces as you could. As public buyers make these requirements and contractors are pivoting and maybe they're not certified to a standard yet, but if they're at the crawl or the walk through the Excellence Program, the good news is they're on their way.

The other good news, it's been our experience too, is that for those smaller contracts that are maybe under a million bucks, buyers give contractors lots of time and they publicize it broadly. So, you've got time, some smaller contracts, a contractor could have maybe two, three, four years, because the buyer's saying, "Listen, in three or four years, you got to be certified to these standards."

If they're already going down the path and they're already crawling and walking, the Excellence Program's going to get them to running in that amount of time. It'll give them that opportunity and time to take a structured approach to getting certified to that standard, for example, our Certificate of Recognition. You're not starting from scratch.

**Maren Gamble:**

You actually made me think of something there, Chris, while you were talking. Even in the case of public tenders or tenders in general where there isn't a certification requirement at this stage, generally there is a health and safety requirement. There's often some means of verifying or submitting proof of components of a system or program or things like that. Even in that sense, the Excellence Program makes sense because you're developing those different pieces that are being looked for regardless of whether a specific certification is being asked for.

Really, these are the fundamentals that you're going to want to bid work in general moving forward, whether it ends up under a certification umbrella or not. Just for bidding work, it seems like a big win in general.

**Ken Rayner:**

Maren, Ontario's prevention system, so the WSIB, the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, and the six Health and Safety Associations talk a lot about prevention culture.

I'm interested, how does a structured program like the Health and Safety Excellence Program support that cultural shift to a culture of care rather than just being a program that's adding a lot of administrative work? How can it actually help to change the culture and not just seen as a paperwork exercise?

**Maren Gamble:**

I think this is just a fabulous question, because some of this is history of health and safety, occupational health and safety stuff, and some of this is just how we interpret things. We think about culture in general, we do think about it as being a very human thing, because it is. It's the interactions and integration of the human perspectives in real life. Take that for what you will, for me, just rambling on that definition.

Whereas you hear structured program, like Health and Safety Excellence, as soon as you hear that, you think non-human, that's not human, that has nothing to do with people interacting. That's going to be doing some formal things and two separate things. It really isn't. I think this is one of the running themes that I've had through our chat today and whenever we talk separately, is that the beauty of an occupational health and safety management system is that it is human. It's taking that extra step.

It's not just the program on the shelf. It's not just a manual that you've written and you've set it on a shelf and it's maybe collecting dust, maybe it's in your computer and nobody clicks that link. It's not something that's just sitting there. Taking it to that systematic place where it is actually growing, being shaped by the people in your jobsite, being used by the people in your jobsite, per Chris' example earlier, being talked about by people on your jobsite, you are spreading the workload. It's not just the health and safety department. Everybody's doing it.

But not only that, everybody's doing it as part of their natural process. It doesn't become this burden, this administrative burden, because we're talking about it. We're doing it. It's part of who we are. It's part of how we do the work. And all of a sudden, the fact that you've used this structured program, which sounds cold and inhuman, actually has allowed you to make safety more human than it ever has been before, because it's asking us to go through Plan-Do-Check-Act. Ken, you and I have talked about the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle before and how it really helps things to grow and live. The Health and Safety Excellence Program really does focus on principles of the cycle and continuous improvement.

This program is one of the programs that exists that allows you to make health and safety real life, not administrative, and that's a beautiful thing.

**Chris McKean:**

From the real life versus administrative, that ergonomics example I gave on a jobsite. They're having this conversation about the controls they've implemented and why, and that's not going to be the only task on that jobsite or jobsites that's going to involve this. What happens from that conversation? The superintendent documents it. It gets communicated broadly across the organization. People see it, going, "Oh, this is a control that was implemented for these specific reasons and highly involved the workers. We're probably going to want to address these on our site too."

I think that's the cultural part too. You get the communication in there.

**Ken Rayner:**

Very true. We were talking about, again, dollar amounts on certain things, maybe the value. I don't know how you put a dollar amount on a culture shift. It's priceless, I think, in terms of the value that it brings to an organization because it's priceless.

**Chris McKean:**

Well-put, it is priceless.

**Ken Rayner:**

It is priceless. Yeah, for sure.

Okay. One last question for you. You've been amazing at sharing all of your guidance and expertise on this topic. Thank you very much.

If you could give just one piece of advice to an Ontario employer just starting to build their occupational health and safety management system, so they've maybe gotten to the end of the crawl stage and they're ready to start working and want to build something that truly lasts, what would be that one piece of advice that you'd give?

Maren, let's start with you.

**Maren Gamble:**

Where my mind immediately goes with this is to a conversation I've had with various firms when talking about the Health and Safety Excellence Program in the past. Sometimes firms can feel like they're behind everyone else. They've got a secret that they don't actually know fully if they're doing hazard assessment right, or they feel like they might not be doing what everyone else is doing, training, and they're keeping it to themselves. It's a secret in the card game of business. Because they're worried that they're behind. They're worried that people find out that they don't understand this, it'll reflect poorly on them.

The opposite is actually true. Asking the questions about what you're not confident on, tackling them, getting support, this is how you can address those things so you don't have to feel like they're secrets that you worry about at night anymore. Now you can sleep, get your beauty sleep for the entire night and confidently know that you've explored those things, simply by connecting with a consultant who, believe me, they've heard it all. Nothing is shocking in terms of how your business structure is.

Asking the question is the big deal. Getting that development is the big deal. You don't have to carry that yourself and you're not the only one. It does not make you look bad to ask for help.

**Ken Rayner:**

I love that, Maren. It goes back to something. One of the first times that I think you and I met each other, which was at least 10 years ago, and IHSA was doing a forum, talking about just this topic. We had brought in our very first certified firms and were working with other firms that were looking to become certified as well to the COR® standard.

When we asked the question, "What would you do differently if you started this whole process again?", the number one response we got from those COR®-certified firms was, "We would ask more questions of IHSA." So, great, great piece of advice that. I appreciate that.

**Maren Gamble:**

10 years later, it's still my answer. There you go.

**Ken Rayner:**

It's still the answer. There you go. It's a lasting answer. It's a true one that's applicable 10 years ago and it's applicable today.

Chris, what about you? What about a piece of advice to an Ontario employer?

**Chris McKean:**

I think what I heard from that was being courageous. Ask the questions. You can't ask the wrong questions in safety. If you're courageous enough to ask the questions, you're asking the right questions. It's the flip side of the coin where if you're not asking, that's not great.

I think if I could give one piece of advice is, you've hired the people that work with you for a reason. You hired them, so put your trust in them, build that culture through that trust, because in a workplace, culture trumps everything. And once you're there, like Nike, just do it, but in small pieces.

**Ken Rayner:**

Right on. Maren, I heard from you the piece of advice to an Ontario employer, "Be curious and ask those questions.", and Chris, "to be courageous to ask those questions." Amazing really, throughout this entire episode, all of the guidance and expertise that the two of you have provided with all of your years of experience to our listeners. Thank you both for being on the *IHSA Safety Podcast* today.

**Chris McKean:**

It was great.

**Maren Gamble:**

Thanks for having us.

**Chris McKean:**

Happy to be here.

**Ken Rayner:**

Thank you to the listeners for listening to our episode on Building Better Health and Safety Systems through WSIB's Health and Safety Excellence Program.

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