First Student has been a leader in bus transportation in Canada for quite some time. It is also a leader in health and safety. First Student is one of the first transportation companies to seek out the Certificate of Recognition (COR™) in Ontario. The company runs school buses coast to coast, as well as some municipal transit systems such as the ones in Barrie and Orangeville. It has approximately 10,000 school buses on Canadian roads. When you see a school bus in your neighbourhood, it’s likely a First Student bus.

When COR™ was introduced to Ontario, First Student jumped on it. Having already been certified in Alberta, the company knew the value of COR™ certification. “When I joined First Student, it was going through a COR™ audit in Alberta, so I had to quickly learn what a COR™ audit meant,” says Barry House, Health and Safety Manager for Canada at First Student. “Being on the Board of Directors for IHSA, I first heard about COR™ coming to Ontario during a presentation at one of our meetings. It got me interested. I saw the benefits of being certified.” Mr. House went on to explain that those benefits relate largely to the bidding process.

“We are a business that relies on contracts. Whenever we’re bidding on a contract, it’s always good to have something that sets us apart from the others. COR™ will set us apart.”

In the construction industry, many predict that COR™ will become a vital component of the bid process. Mr. House feels the same will happen in the transportation industry. “Based on my experience in Alberta and my years as a health and safety professional, I think COR™ will eventually become a requirement. I think the sooner companies get on board, the better. You definitely don’t want to be on the outside looking in,” he says. “There are so many resources available to help you prepare for the audit, including IHSA consultants who will come out to your location.”

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Many companies see COR™ as a logical next step after participating in Safety Groups. “We had been doing Safety Groups for a number of years, so we had been using the same instrument over and over again. We liked the idea of using something different. It forced us to look at things differently, which was refreshing. We also liked the idea of being able to audit ourselves,” says Mr. House.

COR™ focuses on 19 elements that promote healthy and safe behaviour. To become certified, a firm must first pass an internal audit of its health and safety policy and program and then pass an external, third-party audit.

“If you’ve been doing Safety Groups, you’ve already proven that you have a health and safety management system, so with some additional work, you can use what you’ve done with Safety Groups for the COR™ audit,” explains Mr. House as he describes his company’s experience. “Obviously, the COR™ audit is more in-depth than a Safety Groups audit because you have to do a number of interviews with employees and sometimes go to multiple locations, but the two programs certainly dovetail very well.”

Jane Wilkinson, First Student’s Senior Regional Safety Manager for Eastern Canada, agrees. After being involved with Safety Groups for several years, she feels First Student is ready to take things a step further. “I’m really looking forward to the employee interviews that are part of the COR™ process because they will help validate our training and identify some of the gaps that may not be obvious to upper management,” she says. “Talking to our employees will let us know how the policies and procedures are being received. I think that’s really where the value is.”

Save the date: AGM
IHSA will hold its Annual General Meeting on September 10, 2013. The meeting will take place at the Centre for Health and Safety Innovation in Mississauga, Ontario. Visit ihsa.ca in the coming months for details.

Learn more about COR™
To join First Student and the other firms that are working towards COR™ certification, visit ihsa.ca/cor. For more information about the program, visit ihsa.ca/products and download the Certificate of Recognition brochure (IHSA022).