

Training standards are coming to Ontario

Sometimes it takes all day. Sometimes it takes only half a day. And sometimes it's no more than a video over lunch. Depending on where you work and who you work for, the training you get can vary widely. That's one of the problems that were highlighted in the 2010 report of the Expert Advisory Panel on Occupational Health and Safety. The panel's report called for "rigorous training standards that set a minimum standard for high-risk activities such as working at heights in the construction industry." Since then, the Ministry of Labour has been working on establishing those standards, which would regulate occupational health and safety training in the province.

"Training standards will level the playing field and ensure that all workers start work with the same knowledge and understanding," says Cordelia Clarke Julien. She is the Director of Training and Safety Programs in the Prevention Office. Right now her department's priority is to create a provincial training standard for working at heights. As a first step, Ms. Clarke Julien and her team have assembled a development group that includes employer and labour representatives. IHSA is working with the group, providing assistance and expertise on the construction, electrical, and transportation industries.

Course content

Ms. Clarke Julien explains that under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, employers are required to give their workers certain training, depending on the kind of work they do. However, the Act doesn't specify what that training should cover, who should give it, or how long it should be.

That's the current situation with working at heights training. "The training standard will say exactly what a certain training program must cover," says Ms. Clarke Julien. "For example, if you are going to work at heights, the training standard will state clearly what you have to know and understand before you start work."

Instructors' qualifications

Ontario's new health and safety training standards will apply to the instructor as well as the course content. "The standards we're working on will not only look at the quality of the content but also the quality of the instruction," says Ms. Clarke Julien. She explains that the reason for this is to encourage interaction between participants and the instructor. Instructors need to be able to answer industry-specific or task-specific questions and provide relevant examples.

Standards in other provinces

Health and safety training standards are not a new concept. Some provinces already have them, and those provinces have seen their injury rates drop as a result. Newfoundland and Labrador is one example. At IHSA's recent Annual General Meeting, Jackie Manuel, CEO of the Newfoundland and Labrador Construction Safety Association, described how a fall protection training standard reduced falls from heights by 25 per cent since April 2011.

Progress in Ontario

The working at heights training standard development group will soon hold consultations with industry stakeholders. Next year, the focus will be on implementation. "The Expert Advisory Panel was stage one. Developing the draft standard for working at heights training is stage two. That's where we are now. Deciding how the standard will be put into effect is stage three," says Ms. Clarke Julien. "We're looking at 2014 before the standard will be ready. At that point we can put it forward and then we'll need a regulation change to make it mandatory."