

# Working at Heights Training Standard: Industry perspective

IHSA wanted to hear a variety of perspectives on the new training standard to find out how this change will impact different sectors. We posed similar questions to representatives from several groups to learn their thoughts on this new direction.

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## Why do you think a standard for working at heights training is important?

**MA:** It's important because it requires training to meet specific requirements in the standard and as a result it will allow auditing to be carried out to make sure the standard is being met and workers are being re-trained to the standard. In addition, organizations that wish to deliver this training will need to prove that they have the expertise and knowledge to provide training that meets the standard.

**IC:** A great number of workplace accidents are related to working at heights. It's important for those who are required to work at heights to be properly trained to recognize the hazards in their workplaces and to know how to properly use the procedures and equipment that will keep them safe.

**PD:** The system needs to have a general practice, and everyone needs to follow the same principles when it comes to training. Some employers hire outside

consultants who create their own programs, which are dubious at best. This standard will ensure that all the trainers and programs follow a consistent approach.

In the last few years, a number of foreign companies have entered Ontario's construction industry, and they are implementing their own training programs, which they are also using in other jurisdictions. Unfortunately, some of the training is suspect and the credentials of the trainers are not up to par. A standard will create continuity and lead to better outcomes.

I am aware that certain employer lobby groups are against any standard. They view standards and any type of regulation as affecting competitiveness and negatively impacting their bottom lines. Personally, I feel that any employer that is standard-adverse is simply "gaming" the system. Anyone convicted of "gaming" the system and undermining the standard should face jail time or be fined heavily.

In Ontario, in the last 10 years, employers have received billions of dollars in rebates from the WSIB. Meanwhile, serious injuries, fatalities, and occupational diseases have actually gone up. If those billions had been re-invested in better training and real workplace safety initiatives that could empower workers to participate and report workplace hazards without fear of employer reprisals, Ontario would have the safest workplaces in the world.

Moreover, if employers had invested the funds they spent on lobbying against standards and regulations and had spent it on real training and prevention instead, the number of serious injuries would be lower.





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## What would you say is the general reaction to news of the new standard?

**MA:** For the most part, the reaction to the news has been positive. My sense is that if standards can be developed with the assistance and support of the industry, best-of-class standards can be developed for other high-risk activities as well.

**IC:** Generally, the reaction to the new training program standard has been positive. No one would argue with its intent, which is to provide workers with the knowledge and tools to stay safe. It's hazard-based, not prescriptive. It requires a demonstration of skills, offers flexibility for training providers, and addresses the needs of vulnerable workers.

However, concerns have been voiced about the fact that the training must be renewed every three years. That may be too frequent, especially for those who work at heights regularly and who are well-trained and skilled. There are also questions about equivalencies and grandfathering. In addition, there are concerns that the Training Provider Standard was not made public at the same time as the Training Program Standard. But all in all, the general tone of the reaction has been positive.

**PD:** My general reaction is that it's good news and it's about time. In the last 10 years, there have been 120 allowed fatality claims that were due to falls from heights.\* This standard, when fully implemented, will begin to decrease and hopefully eliminate deaths from falls.

\* Based on WSIB statistics (2003–2013)

## How do you think this will impact front-line workers and employers?

**MA:** Front-line workers who are required to wear fall-arrest equipment as well as understand the requirements and risks of working around fall hazards will greatly benefit from this training. Employers will also appreciate the training and appreciate why they need to continuously assess the risks of fall hazards to ensure their workforce is adequately protected.

**IC:** Hopefully, employers who are already doing the right thing—training and supervising their people properly, implementing effective health and safety management programs, and developing and strengthening a culture of safety in their workplaces—will see no difference. However, there will be many employers who will need a little help and who will have to make increased investments in health and safety training.

It's important to note that increased investment in health and safety not only produces improved health and safety outcomes, but also delivers higher levels of productivity, so the cost could be zero. The greatest challenge will be to convert the wilful non-compliers—those who are not committed to getting on the path to health and safety excellence—and get them on board.

**PD:** Any time you implement interventions that prevent serious injury and deaths it is positive. Workers will get home safely. This, in turn, will attract more people to the construction industry because it will show that construction work can be performed safely, with the right training and standards that are effective.

## How do you see IHSA's *Working at Heights* training program and trainer competency requirements fitting into this standard?

**MA:** I believe IHSA is the best safety association in the country, with a great reputation and with the best in-house trainers who have the field knowledge, experience, and understanding to do a great job. They will deliver the standardized training with professional results. It's a win-win for workers, supervisors, employers, and contractors.

**IC:** IHSA has extensive experience developing and delivering working at heights training programs that serve the needs of the construction industry effectively. The success of these programs is derived both from the course content and from IHSA's stable of highly qualified trainers. I've been assured that IHSA's current *Working at Heights* program meets the purpose of the new training program standard, and I'm confident that IHSA will continue to be a leading provider of working at heights training to its members. Employers must not wait until the new standards are in effect. They should continue to provide their workers with working at heights training.

**PD:** IHSA's program and trainer competency is the gold standard. This program was created jointly with labour and management. The current IHSA model serves as an effective mechanism for soliciting and receiving credible input from industry.

When it comes to advancing effective health and safety management and delivery in sector-specific industries, IHSA is truly bi-partite and is driven by stakeholder participation.

## What should IHSA do to ensure its members are aware of these changes?

**MA:** A public education campaign will help get the message out. As well, IHSA should reach out to the various worker and employer organizations in Ontario.

**IC:** IHSA already has an effective communications strategy that includes its website, magazines and other publications, presentations, trade shows, and social media. Finding a way to refine that strategy so it also speaks to the wilful non-compliers in a compelling way will be IHSA's greatest challenge. But if it can do it, significant improvements in health and safety performance will follow.

**PD:** Publicize the standard every chance you get. Moreover, IHSA's Labour-Management Health and Safety Committees need to be involved. And the regulatory proposal should also go through IHSA's Network for review.

I would also suggest that the Prevention Office initiate a public awareness campaign to let stakeholders and the general public know about the standard.

## As a result of this new standard and the changes that are to come, what do you hope to see in Ontario in a year's time with respect to workers and employers in the province?

**MA:** I would expect to see some targets established and tracked on the type of training carried out, the sector the workers come from, the types of groups that have train-the-trainer status, and the number of audits carried out and their results, as well as an objective analysis and rating of the fall standard. The most important result we hope to see is that the training standard had an impact, that it led to a dramatic reduction or elimination of needless fall accidents.

**IC:** The vision of the recently released integrated health and safety strategy, of which the new Working at Heights Training Program Standard is an element, is "safe and healthy workplaces." COCA will do its part to spread the word and do what it can to make construction workplaces safer.

**PD:** Simply no deaths. Workers need to return home safe. This may be a big wish, but it's something worth fighting for. I think that all the workplace parties need to become committed to creating Ontario's first Occupational Health and Safety Strategy. The Working at Heights Training Standard is just one component of the broader strategy.

I think any prevention strategy needs to have as its key underpinning the concept of worker empowerment. The current occupational health and safety system in Ontario has done little to create a supportive culture for workers to drive change in the workplace. In fact, the last 500 coroner's inquests into construction deaths clearly show that if certain safety practices had been followed, the worker deaths would not have occurred. I hope that, with the implementation of this new standard, the industry as a whole will benefit.