

# IHSA Section 21 committees: Guiding safety for decades

The Infrastructure Health & Safety Association (IHSA), like its legacy associations, is structured so that its members can advise on health and safety needs for Ontario. Through the IHSA's two provincial labour-management committees (which are called Section 21 committees), IHSA members can help shape health and safety legislation in the province—that's something that benefits all workers.

One of the two Section 21 committees hosted by IHSA is for the construction sector; the other is for the electrical sector. Both committees consist of representatives of labour, industry, and the Ontario government, and both serve to channel information and advice from industry and labour members to the Ministry of Labour. This keeps the Ministry up-to-date about working conditions and issues in these two vital sectors.

## Provincial Labour-Management Health and Safety Committee - Construction

The Provincial Labour-Management Health and Safety Committee (PLMHSC) for construction was formed in 1968 and was given Section 21 status as an advisory committee in 1996. (Section 21 is the part of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* that defines these committees.)

This Section 21 committee is also at the hub of IHSA's network of trade and regional committees for the construction sector. These committees feed into the PLMHSC, which in turn is linked to the Ministry of Labour.

Anyone can bring an issue before the PLMHSC. Usually an issue is first discussed by the trade or



regional committee, which decides whether to take it to the PLMHSC. If it does and if the PLMHSC decides the issue has merit, it may set up a subcommittee to look into the issue. And if the subcommittee recommends that changes need to be

made to the regulations, the PLMHSC will send those recommendations to the Minister of Labour.

One of the two co-chairs of the construction PLMHSC is Jim LaFontaine. He says there are many benefits to this kind of committee: "The benefit of the provincial committee is, first and foremost, being recognized as an official Section 21 Advisory Committee to the Minister of Labour."

"The committee represents over 400,000 construction workers, trade unions, and construction employers. It also has 23 trade and 16 regional committees at its disposal to do research on specific occupational health and safety issues. We can tap into this wealth of knowledge for subcommittee work and make solid recommendations to the MOL on changes to the regulations."

LaFontaine believes that the committee system makes it possible for the various interest groups, such as employers, workers, and unions, to reach agreement as legislative changes move forward from idea to law.

"The PLMHSC represents a multitude of stakeholders and reaches decisions by consensus," he says. "That approach strengthens the bonds of the internal responsibility system. It means that when there is a change to the *Occupational Health and Safety Act and Construction Regulations* ("the Green Book"), everyone supports it. The Ministry of Labour worked with the PLMHSC to form the Construction Legislative Review Committee, which is a subcommittee of the PLMHSC. This allows the PLMHSC to be part of any changes from the beginning and to comment during the drafting stage on the direction the Ministry of Labour has taken."



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Although not every member of IHSA can sit on the PLMHSC, members are needed at other levels. “The PLMHSC can’t have everyone attend their meetings, but we rely on the network membership volunteering time to work on the many subcommittees and working groups to improve occupational health and safety in Ontario.”

“Joe Redshaw (the other co-chair) and I urge all employers and trade associations to improve safety in the workplace by volunteering to help in regulation reviews or to sit on a subcommittee which reviews specific areas of the construction industry that continue to face challenges with injuries or other issues,” says LaFontaine.

### **Provincial Labour-Management Safety Committee - Electrical**

The other Provincial Labour-Management Safety Committee hosted by IHSA is for the electrical industry. This PLMSC has a long history of bringing representatives of government, labour, and management together to improve workplace safety in Ontario’s electrical and utility sectors.

This committee was established in the 1970s by the then Minister of Labour, Betty Stevenson, to discuss occupational health and safety issues in the electrical and utilities industries in Ontario and to advise the Minister on those issues.

The electrical utility contractors are represented on the PLMSC by Dean Gatien of PowerTel, who has attended the electrical labour-management committee for many years. He believes that the committee offers its members unique opportunities: “The meetings are a place where the committee

members can exchange industry knowledge and expertise and advise the Minister of Labour on issues effecting the industry, regulations, and training. In this forum, the successes and best practices of both the private and public sector are used to improve and guide the electrical industry in Ontario.”

As an official advisory committee under Section 21 of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* of Ontario, the electrical labour-management committee may

- review existing and proposed legislation that concerns the health and safety of workers in the industries represented on the committee
- make recommendations to the Ministry of Labour or other ministries and organizations
- discuss any health and safety issues in order to influence the decisions of any ministry or organization
- comment or advise on the recommendations of a coroner’s jury when they concern the electrical and utility industries.

Gatien says the greatest benefit of the committee is “the exposure to all the agencies, contractors, utilities, associations, and unions that are in the industry. The exchange of views and experiences is of great importance to our industries. The bottom line from all of this is the effect we continue to have on improving worker safety.”

In his opinion, “the relationship building on the committee enhances the ability of people to agree on solutions to issues. These solutions are usually the best-practices approach to doing things. The electrical sector has always been ahead of the wave and has acted as an industry leader. Participating in such an atmosphere is a big motivator for organizations to continue improving.”