The Certificate of Recognition (COR™) is a nationally recognized standard that gives employers a tool for assessing and strengthening their workplace health and safety management system.

Over 1,000 firms in Ontario are actively pursuing COR™ certification. With the momentum growing, IHSA hosted a COR™ leadership roundtable for industry leaders and health and safety professionals in March of this year. The roundtable was part of the Leadership Conference held every year by the Ontario General Contractors Association (OGCA).

The testimonials and influence of the participants go a long way towards revealing why more and more businesses are calling COR™ an integral investment in the workplaces of tomorrow.

Showing proof of legal compliance
By being COR™ certified, a firm proves that it meets or exceeds a recognized national standard. It is then able to demonstrate to any outside party that every year its health and safety management system has been developed, implemented, and evaluated through comprehensive internal and external audits.

A large part of meeting a standard like COR™ comes from recognizing that there is always room for improvement. In the case of TACC Construction, a fatality in the company 18 years ago prompted it to focus heavily on effective safety measures. As the general manager, Ben Ruggeiri, explains,

“We always thought and assumed our program was tip-top and above and beyond the standards, but what COR™ showed us, what it exposed us to, was all the flaws that we had. It wasn’t until our second year of the COR™ process, and through having some failures, that we could actually appreciate what it was trying to make us do.”

Raising the bar for your health and safety standards
One of the biggest challenges facing a company when it tries to obtain COR™ certification is that it has to meet a standard, one which is higher than the norm. But overcoming that obstacle will make your business a safer place to work.

The health and safety manager at TACC, Jerry Muzzerald, pointed out that this was especially noticeable with job hazard assessments.

“First we had to admit that we weren’t doing it right. Everybody has a way of doing things, and at the time we rationalized that it was good enough, while the reality is that COR™ is significantly higher than the Green Book.”
Joining a growing network of leaders
Beginning a journey toward COR™ certification opens a lot of doors: This becomes most evident when organizations that are in the process, or have successfully completed COR™, give testimonials to other companies that are thinking about becoming COR™ certified or may be having difficulties with the process.

The purpose of the OGCA Leadership Conference is to bring prominent industry leaders together to share their experiences and difficulties. This not only allows those in attendance to learn from these leaders, but also, more importantly, shows them they aren’t alone through the COR™ process. As David Frame, the director of government relations for OGCA, explains,

“It’s based upon an understanding that effective health and safety—particularly in an industry like construction that has a lot of hazards—starts when the leadership inside of a company, the CEOs, the executive leadership, say that we are going to make sure our employees are kept healthy and safe.

We do [the conference] as a check-in every year to discuss what’s happening in the industry, share best practices, and talk about what’s new. It’s a great opportunity to take a few hours to consider your commitment to safety, to learn from others, get some great ideas, and refocus on how we can do even more to protect our workers.

Attracting safety-conscious workers
COR™ is a tool that can enhance a firm’s corporate image within the industry it works in and the community it serves. When this kind of commitment is revealed, it generates a strong culture of safety that will attract safety-conscious workers.

The president and CEO of Benson Steel, Steve Benson, is already seeing the benefits of developing that culture in his organization, and he hopes to be COR™ certified by the end of the year.

How IHSA can help
COR™ Essentials is one of four mandatory training requirements of the COR™ program. In an effort to better facilitate this half-day course, IHSA now offers it online through eLearning multimedia training. Be sure to visit the eLearning portal on IHSA’s website for more information.

“This organizations have become the pillars, they’ve become the reliable stewards of health and safety in the Province of Ontario.”

The Honourable Kevin Flynn, Minister of Labour, praised the efforts of the system partners in promoting and changing the safety culture in the construction industry of Ontario.
We’ve always had a health and safety mantra, but COR™ is about getting the whole team from the executive down to your boots-on-the-ground people to buy in. It makes a big difference in your workforce.

Engaging workers
Participation in COR™ is something that begins at the top of an organization and filters down. That creates an environment where management and supervisors need to lead by example. It also gets employees involved in the process of hazard assessment and gives them a voice in the duties they perform.

Benson Steel’s health and safety manager, Mike Barron, said they saw an immediate improvement in the development stages of their health and safety system when they asked the employees directly how they could improve the process.

It not only made our program better, but it also made all of our workers more engaged, like they’re part of the team and they’re not just an employee.

Increasing the bottom line
At the Leadership Day, the director of capital works at the City of Brampton, Jayne Holmes, announced that Brampton City Council had unanimously adopted the COR™ program as part of the city’s process for managing construction projects and the tendering of construction contracts.

As more municipalities and buyers of construction make COR™ a prerequisite for bidding on large infrastructure projects, the firms available to meet those qualifications will have a competitive advantage. As this momentum around COR™ continues, so too do the incentives for contractors to invest in their health and safety programs.

Frank Perricone, president and CEO of Percon Construction Inc. and OGCA chairman, says that the bottom line is a benefit, but that COR™ is really about effective leadership.

We found in the last three years that our projects are running smoother, our bottom line is getting better. I can tell you from the financial end, it does pay off but I always tell people we shouldn’t look at it that way. This is really about getting people that are under your control on your sites and in your shops home safely and there’s no value you can put to that.

Doing the right thing
Protecting the health and safety of all workers at all times should be the primary focus of any firm, no matter what the task at hand is. With COR™, a company can develop and maintain their health and safety management system, and that will allow them to take a proactive approach to preventing workplace injuries and illnesses. It’s not a quick fix; it’s an attempt to change the firm’s safety culture permanently.

Maren Gamble, health and safety manager at Percon, noted that making safety a priority in a company is a big change but a necessary one.

It’s not something you set out to achieve and put on the wall or on the shelf and be done with it. You start looking ahead to wanting to achieve COR™ by deciding to change your company, by deciding to change the culture, and by deciding to change it in ways that you might not even realize are the ways you need to change it... it’s a forever change.

Paul Casey, vice-president of Programs & Strategic Development at IHSA, provided a COR™ report card summarizing the auditing tool and its performances and mandates

Maren Gamble, health and safety manager at Percon Construction, was one of the panel members who offered insight and advice to those working through the COR™ process.