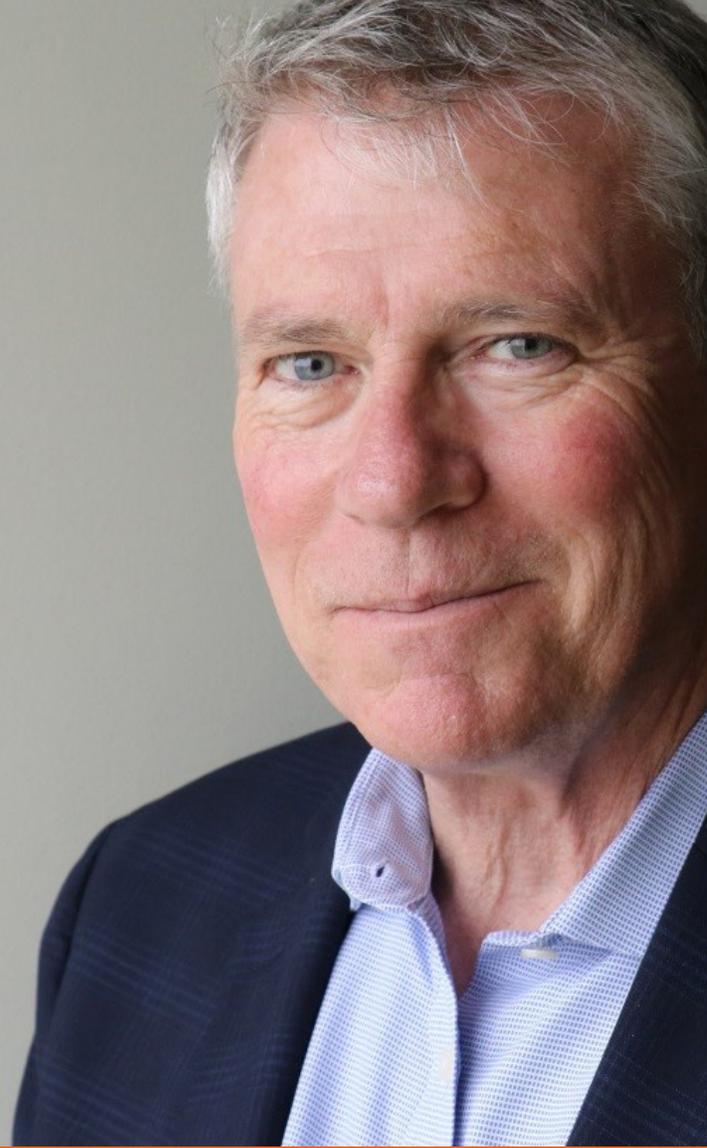


Q & A

with
Ron Kelusky



IHSA talks health and safety with outgoing Chief Prevention Officer of Ontario

IHSA's President and CEO, Enzo Garritano, recently sat down with outgoing Chief Prevention Officer of Ontario, Ron Kelusky. They spoke about his time as CPO and the future of health and safety in the province. Ron was appointed Chief Prevention Officer in March 2018 and retired in September 2021.

NOTE: The following Q&A is a condensed excerpt from a longer interview. For the full discussion, visit IHSA's podcast page: ihsasafetypodcast.ca.

Q *How do you think Ontario has done in trying to improve health and safety outcomes during your time as CPO?*

A In reducing fatalities, as an example, we still haven't quite got to the point where we have a flat curve that's heading in a downward position. We still have some areas of improvement there. And the same with critical injuries. However, there have been some real positive spots and I think it's foundational work that we are doing in the area of root-cause analysis; starting to understand why injuries are occurring, this focus on a more epidemiological approach to health and safety.

Q *You've been extremely approachable with all sectors. Can you talk a little bit about the value of input from stakeholders?*

A If you don't have the support of the people that you are there to serve, you really don't have the strength. I saw the value of engaging with associations. We saw



that when we were working with the Ontario General Contractors Association and COR™ and moving to *Supporting Ontario's Safe Employers* program. In fact, working with those stakeholders was an opportunity to strengthen the *Supporting Ontario's Safe Employers* program.

Q *When you think about COVID, do you see that as having been an opportunity for taking more of a primary, centre-stage perspective in the minds of workplaces?*

A I think the good news is that it raised the profile of health and safety. The bad news is that it identified some very clear weaknesses on what we had perceived with health and safety, especially with smaller organizations. We asked people, especially essential businesses, “Can you do a risk assessment to determine how to deal with where you need to apply the hierarchy of controls?” What we got back was, “What’s a risk assessment? What’s the hierarchy of controls?” We had to start addressing that.

Q *How do you think your role contributed towards the successes in getting communication out?*

A I think early on in COVID, having had the experience of knowing IHSA and our other system partners, it made it easy to mobilize. When the inspectorate came out and said, “Okay, parts of construction are staying open, what do we need to do?” We were quickly able to make a phone call and say: no holds barred, do whatever you need to support the industry through the compliance assistance teams. That was a phone call. That wasn’t pondering and saying, “What am I going to do?” We knew what the system was capable of doing.

Q *You’ve released your new five-year strategy, *Prevention Works*.* Let’s talk about some of its highlights.*

A A lot of the strategy is all about connecting the dots, and it’s all about recognizing that this is a work in progress that you cannot complete at all in five years. The new strategy is about looking at evidence and looking at outcomes.

The second part is the methodology of how we learn and how we get people to absorb what we are trying to tell them.

And the third one is how do we incentivize people to be better? We know through programs like COR™ big companies influence their supply chain, buyers influence their supply chain; we get more support for this health and safety model.

And then, the last of course, is to look into how we work with our small businesses and small business associations to get those hard-to-reach, hard-to-serve areas.

Q *We’ve seen through the pandemic the necessity for different ways of doing things. Delivering health and safety training is one of them. For example, the move to virtual, instructor-led training, and an increased acceptance of eLearning.*

A The move that has been done to the virtual classroom has really ensured that we were able to substantially reduce things like transportation costs, facility costs, and actually broadening the availability of programming to areas outside the urban centre. Certainly, we would maintain the practical in-person training, especially a high-risk program.

Q What are your thoughts concerning the direction of mental health and workplace violence, as well as occupational disease?

A One in five people in Canada suffer from mental health challenges and they bring that into the workplace. For that reason it has to be top of mind for employers. And we also see in some of those high-risk areas the need to start looking at occupational disease. Particularly construction. When the study came out of Cancer Care Ontario,** there were four cancers that were identified that just described the construction industry: diesel exhaust, asbestos, silica, and UV. It's a fairly substantial cost to the system. We've got to start now from a prevention point of view to deal with issues emerging 25 years from now.

Q Do you have any final thoughts on some of your accomplishments during your tenure as Ontario's CPO?

A I think the first one is getting people to recognize that health and safety is a system. The Ministry alone can't do it all. So unless we have policy, operations, and prevention working with the WSIB, the system partners, and the private sector, if we don't picture ourselves in that environment we won't be successful.

One of the others was starting to move towards more of an outcomes, epidemiological approach to health and safety, where we understand why things happen through risk assessments and root cause analysis, such as in trucking and residential construction roofing.

Q What is your departing message in regard to health and safety that you want to leave us with?

A I'll say the advice that I would give to my replacement would be that we've built a foundation and in order to be successful, don't try to build the house in a short period of time. We want to have strong footings on what we want to build on. We want to create sustainability in the system. It's long-term, but it's got to be sustainable. Having noise prevention week needs to be noise prevention 365 days a year. We need to be able to bring things top of mind.

We've got a lot of talent, we've got a lot of expertise, but we've got to continue to pursue the professionalization of health and safety in the province.

We need to make sure that the person giving advice is a credible person. So credentialing our businesses, whether it's through COR™ or whether it's through a recognized standard, and ensuring that our people are providing health and safety advice, are clearly qualified, and capable of doing excellent work.

***Prevention Works:**

www.ontario.ca/document/prevention-works

****The Burden of Occupational Cancer in Ontario:**

www.occupationalcancer.ca/2017/occupational-burden-ontario-report



Ron Kelusky, together with other delegates, attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony at IHSA's new Ottawa Skills Development Centre in June 2019.



Ron Kelusky with IHSA's Enzo Garritano and the Ontario General Contractors Association's Craig Lesurf, at the OGCA Leadership Day/IHSA COR™ Open House in March 2020.