

Why construction buyers and businesses adopt COR[®]

When it comes to workplace health and safety, everyone benefits from being on the same page.



Lou Gallardi takes a lot of pride in his work. As a Vice President at Newman Bros., he helps to oversee the St. Catharines-based construction company's work for large firms such as General Motors and Ontario Power Generation. He's also responsible for the health and safety of close to 50 employees.

Those employees have racked up more than two million cumulative hours without a lost-time injury. Gallardi credits the company's strong occupational health and safety management system (OHSMS) for creating the culture that made reaching that milestone possible. Since 2020, Newman Bros.' OHSMS has been based on COR[®].

Administered by IHSA and recognized by Ontario's Chief Prevention Officer, COR[®] is an accreditation standard that verifies full implementation of a company's OHSMS—and its success at managing risks, establishing controls, and minimizing injuries and illnesses to workers—through comprehensive internal and external auditing.

Documented excellence

Even for companies that already have appropriate policies and procedures in place, COR[®] is a vital tool to reinforce, improve, and consistently apply best practices. For Newman Bros., that meant using the principles of COR[®] to help standardize health and safety documentation in an electronic format to make it accessible to all workers and ensure that it could be tracked accurately.

"I'm heavily invested in all the documents. I want to know what's going on, I want to understand it, and I want to make sure everybody else understands it," Gallardi says.

"Every morning we have pre-job safety discussions with the supervisory staff and workers on site. They review the documents and job tasks for the day. And then I get information from the supervisory staff through discussions. I talk to them to find out that everyone has understood the safety implications and that the right protocols are in place—and that the workers are actually adapting to them."

Ensuring that this type of consistent, verifiable health and safety communication takes place is a hallmark of a COR[®]-certified OHSMS. But it's hardly the only purpose of the standard. The step-by-step process of achieving COR[®] certification ensures that a company establishes, implements, monitors, and maintains policies and procedures for everything from hazard assessment and control to workplace inspections to change management.

While working toward COR[®] certification, companies can also participate in the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board's Health and Safety Excellence program (HSEp). Many of its modules align with COR[®], and their successful completion can lead to rebates on a firm's WSIB premiums. Likewise, companies that become COR[®] 2020-certified are eligible to apply for recognition and financial rewards through the provincial government's Supporting Ontario's Safe Employers (SOSE) program.

A system that works

Many of Ontario's largest buyers of construction agree that COR®-certified firms have better health and safety outcomes. Indeed, a 2022 study by the University of British Columbia confirmed that COR® companies experienced a 28 per cent reduction in their lost-time injury rate. Buyers such as Metrolinx, the Toronto Transit Commission, Infrastructure Ontario, and the cities of Toronto, Mississauga, Vaughan, and Brampton (and, as of 2024, Ottawa) require COR® certification as a condition of contract.

The City of Vaughan began requiring COR® in early 2020—initially for projects valued at more than \$25 million. The requirement was then phased in over time for lower-budgeted contracts. As of September 2023, any firm bidding on construction work valued at \$500,000 or more must be COR®-certified.

Jack Graziosi, Vaughan's Director of Infrastructure Delivery*, says that given the city's growth, adopting COR® was an easy call.

"There is inherent risk in any type of construction, and in many cases we are importing this risk into people's communities," he says. "So we have to ensure that not only is the municipality committed to health and safety, but that our partner contractors and consultants are equally committed to it."

In the field, Graziosi says his inspectors have noticed a cultural shift since Vaughan's COR® requirement came into effect. Because COR®-certified contractors know their health and safety management system meets a high standard, they understand that when City staff visit a jobsite, "It's not because they're looking to write someone up, but because they're part of the overall system that ensures everyone's well-being."

At Newman Bros., Gallardi takes this perspective to heart. "I actually encourage inspectors to come to our jobsites because I want them to see our programs in action," he says. "I want them to let me know if there is anything we could improve upon."

Knowledge is power

Whether a company is curious about starting its COR® journey, working through the program, or seeking to maintain its certification, IHSA is always available to help. Training courses and workshops provide a detailed breakdown of the elements of COR® and its auditing procedures. (There are also dozens of COR®-specific episodes of the IHSA Safety Podcast.) And IHSA's COR® consultants and lead auditors can offer guidance at various stages of the process—while you continue working to improve your OHSMS following certification.

For Gallardi, those next steps involve educating the sub-trades that his company works with to ensure they also fully understand and follow health and safety protocols on Newman Bros. jobsites.

"I don't want anybody in our company or on our sites getting hurt. The best way I can prevent that is by educating people at all levels," he says.

"At the end of the day, the last thing I want to do is go to somebody's house and tell them that their family member isn't coming home."



More about COR®

Everything you need to know about becoming COR® certified, the buyers that require certification, and more:

ihsa.ca/cor



Workplace mental health: a team effort

Promoting psychological health and wellness at the workplace can make your business safer and more productive. It's also just **the right thing to do**.

Whether you're an employer, supervisor, or worker, IHSA has resources to help support workplace mental health—and improve your own well-being.

At ihsa.ca/workplacementalhealth, you'll learn how to:

- Identify psychosocial hazards on the job
- Build mental health into your health and safety management system
- Become a workplace mental health leader
- Assess your own mental health
- Help coworkers in need
- And much more!

*Prior to this article's publication, Jack Graziosi became the Director of Public Works for the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville.