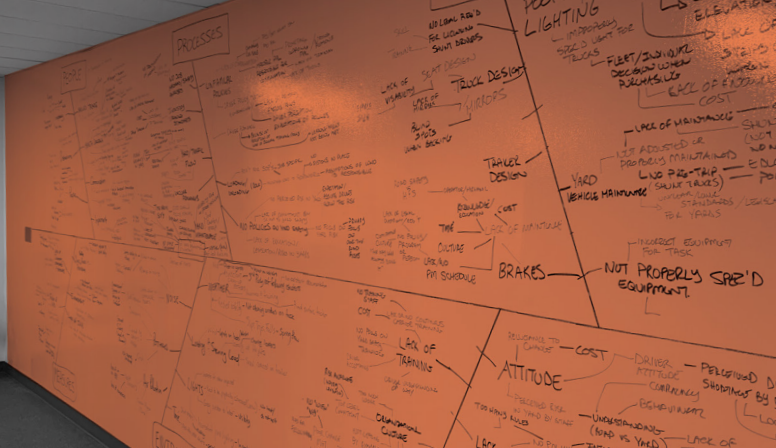


IHSA's root cause analysis methods

How we dig deeper to address workplace hazards—and how you can, too.



Why do serious workplace incidents keep happening, even when everyone seems to follow the rules? Answering that question can take serious digging. The reasons aren't always right in front of you.

IHSA uses root cause analyses (RCAs) to find the deeper issues that often contribute to workplace hazards. Many of Ontario's safest companies use them, too. Getting to the roots of health and safety problems allows us to identify sustainable solutions that will have the greatest impact for our members.

What is root cause analysis?

Think about the type of hazard assessment that's typically performed at the workplace. Its key feature is the day-to-day recognition and control of hazards. These daily inspections are vital to maintaining health and safety, but they're reactive. They help you respond to issues as they come up.

A root cause analysis is an assessment that you do before you encounter an issue. It offers a structured way to proactively identify the underlying causes of incidents.

"It's about moving from traditional hazard assessments to systemic, evidence-based prevention," says Michelle Roberts, Vice President of Stakeholder and Public Relations at IHSA.

IHSA has been conducting root cause analyses since 2019. Through our Labour-Management Network, we host workshops where workers, leadership members, subject-matter experts, and representatives from the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training, and Skills Development (MLITSD) collaborate to understand the "why" behind specific hazards and incident types, such as driver fatigue and falls from heights.

"Involving both labour and management ensures that these workshops consider diverse perspectives and helps to uncover root causes that may not be obvious to one side alone," Roberts says. "It also builds shared ownership of both the process and any solutions that come out of it."

Led by a facilitator, the groups first look to identify key hazards. Then, they use tools such as fishbone diagrams to map contributing factors for those hazards. Participants eventually combine the findings into a shortlist of high-priority areas of focus that they can address with systemic solutions.

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Seeing IHSA's root cause analysis workshops in action

Because IHSA serves multiple industries, we've hosted RCA workshops on a variety of topics. Each one has resulted in actionable recommendations. Here are just a couple examples:

RCA recommendations: truck yard safety

1. Classify truck driving as a Red Seal skilled trade.
2. Address training gaps related to yard safety and shunt drivers.
3. Establish standards for yard lighting, maintenance, and shunt vehicles.
4. Improve enforcement of non-compliant carriers.
5. Promote mental health and wellness, with support tailored to drivers and operations staff.

RCA recommendations: underground utility strikes

1. Implement best practice guidelines for planning and working near underground utilities, defining clear roles and responsibilities for all parties.
2. Promote the standardization of locate markings and documentation, supported by a digital portal with digitized forms.
3. Develop training on accurately reading and interpreting utility locates.
4. Strengthen policies, procedures, and regulations to improve accountability regarding completion and review of locates before excavation.
5. Establish a framework to strengthen workplace safety culture through measurable indicators, management engagement, and worker recognition.

The workshops have also revealed causes that are common to various hazards and that affect all sectors, including training gaps, the piecework nature of work in the skilled trades, and workplace mental health and well-being.

Turning proposals into solutions

In many cases, the systemic solutions proposed by RCA workshops must be implemented at the provincial level or adopted by the industry overall. They must also be implemented at the federal level sometimes. This means IHSA's post-RCA work often focuses on raising awareness among member firms and their workers, as well as advocating for stricter regulations, licensing requirements, and industry support through the Labour-Management Network.

These longer-term efforts, however, are always supported by more immediate outcomes. In recent years, RCA workshops have led IHSA to develop:

- New trade- and hazard-specific training programs on topics ranging from driver fatigue to strategies for preventing slips, trips, and falls
- Comprehensive “awareness week” initiatives to prevent falls and struck-by incidents
- Mental health training tailored to the unique needs of tradespeople and a stress assessment survey for the construction and transportation industries
- Best practice guidelines for high-risk activities like working at heights and working in truck yards

Strengthening safety culture

Beyond producing these important resources, IHSA has applied RCA learnings to our stakeholder engagement efforts. We addressed the need for improved communication and awareness of occupational health and safety hazards and promoted a “culture of care” in high-risk industries.

That culture is reinforced through IHSA's *Keep Your Promise* campaign, a reminder that every jobsite decision has consequences for individuals, their families, and their communities. By framing working safely as a pledge to those who matter most, the campaign strengthens the personal commitment that underpins the success of all safe work practices.

Our *See Something, Say Something* initiative tackles two similar concerns: complacency about health and safety hazards and worker reluctance to raise concerns. The goal is to support a cultural shift that recognizes speaking up as an act of care rather than confrontation.

Digging into high-risk hazards

IHSA has hosted RCA workshops related to the following issues and sectors:

- Driver fatigue in general trucking
- Truck yard safety
- Falls from heights in residential construction, with workshops specific to:
 - Roofers and shinglers
 - Framers and carpenters
 - Siding installers and outside finishers
 - Masons and bricklayers
 - General homebuilders
- Underground utility strikes in civil construction
- Slips, trips, and falls in the surface mining and aggregates industry

And we continue to help members make mental health a pillar of prevention. Training and resources help workplaces better recognize and respond to stress, fatigue, and other psychological hazards, which are known to be significant contributors to illness and injuries.

This is what root cause analysis is all about. It's only possible to build a stronger health and safety *system* by working to solve *systemic* issues. The insights from IHSA's workshops help workplace safety culture move beyond just compliance.

“Root cause analysis promotes proactive, collaborative safety practices,” Roberts says. “It's about listening to workers, supervisors, and employers—and addressing the conditions that shape their daily tasks and their workplaces overall.” ■



The fishbone diagram from the truck yard safety RCA workshop at IHSA's Bowmanville location in 2021.



Discover the *Keep Your Promise* campaign and the *See Something, Say Something* initiative.



Be part of the change



LEARN how you can bring IHSA's awareness week initiatives to your workplace:

- *Struck-by Prevention Toolkit* (W017): ihsa.ca/products/w017
- *Fall Prevention Toolkit* (W016): ihsa.ca/products/w016