BRIEFING

WSPS' Response to an Integrated Occupational Health and Safety Strategy

This spring, WSPS submitted its response to the Ministry of Labour's Prevention Office Discussion Paper which was released to support the overall development of an Ontario Integrated Occupational Health and Safety Strategy later in the year. Following are **some** highlights from the submission, available in full at **wsps.ca**.

Response Overview

Transforming the province's performance depends on designing a strategy that leverages the "whole community"—all Ontarians, communities, the private sector, government at all three levels—with opportunities for everyone to play a role.

Voice of the Customers: the Leading Workplace Parties

Employers and workers should be seen as the leading partners in the design and implementation of an effective OHS strategy – rather than subjects that are administered and controlled by government policy and regulations. As a valuable resource, their skill sets and knowledge fill an informational void and serve to reduce provincial costs. Other system stakeholders – the government, WSIB, safety associations and other resource providers – must be aligned behind them as supporting partners.

Listening to the Needs of Small Businesses

Making it easy for small business owners to do the right thing should be the focus of reaching out to this volatile sector where the need to survive often overshadows their concern for occupational health and safety. Our experience shows that the most successful approach is to offer a mix of self-serve, 24/7 accessibility; online information; and a reasonable price – rather than face-to-face outreach.

New business registration also offers an opportunity to put health and safety information into the hands of business owners when they first register their business. Further, WSPS recommends exploring whether there are efficiency gains and improved learning opportunities in allowing all small businesses to register for WSIB coverage through their relevant health and safety association, with a single business registration number.

High Hazard Activities

The most common high hazard activities should be identified and then ranked according to their degree of risk – with general standards developed for each. While CSA standards are an important foundation, they need to be augmented with detailed, performance-based standards that do not hinder, but rather are flexible and adaptable to enable workplaces to implement them. With increasing complexities and technologies impacting workplaces, it is important to continue evolving supports for specialist resources. In its submission, WSPS has identified certain high hazard activities as priorities for training and calls for an immediate need to define and release standards for competent training.

Integrated Planning and Service Delivery

In order to build a strong province-wide OHS culture, health and safety must become an integral part of routine business and corporate planning in all organizations, regardless of their size. Activities of the OHS supporting partners must be integrated

and harmonized in order to provide employers and workers with a single, transparent consistent set of policy signals that seek to build a culture of workplace safety by encouraging the inclusion of OHS directly into organizational planning.

To improve cost-efficiency and eliminate duplication, WSPS recommends that the Ministry of Labour reaffirm our mandate to provide core shared services to the other safe workplace associations.

Innovative Partnerships

Partnering and cultivating alliances with centres of innovation and knowledge development across Canada will enhance the creation of effective programs to support the needs of workplaces and will allow companies to adopt standard approaches across their operations in different jurisdictions. Development of new partnerships must be driven by customer needs.

WSPS recommends the inclusion of compulsory occupational health and safety in the curriculum of all grades from six to twelve (middle school to secondary school); all trade and apprenticeship training; professional qualifications in engineering and medicine prior to specialization; and business schools.

Support for Workplaces

OHS associations are well positioned to play a positive role in moving workplaces beyond simply complying toward a cultural change of "value-driven safety", augmented by offering them their resources and learning platforms. There is an opportunity for the Chief Prevention Officer to lead the implementation of a viable internal responsibility system (IRS) among workplaces and giving Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committees a more tangible role in implementing the IRS.

Meeting Changing Needs

Advances in technology and new production processes make it increasingly more important to apply an integrated, systemic approach to occupational disease. Workers will need to have access to resources both within and outside of their workplace for themselves, their families and their communities.

Motivating employers to embrace OHS continues to be a challenge – despite a number of current initiatives. Before any new prevention-based programming is contemplated, it is important to ensure that a clear plan be developed for how to make all of the initiatives work together toward common objectives, using common metrics of accomplishment. Motivators must act upon an organization's planning process and be integrated into performance indicators used by companies to track operational effectiveness. Non-monetary motivators such as recognizing social corporate responsibility could also involve the recognition of health and safety practices.

WSPS recommends that a new, open, and transparent process be established for the governance of research priority decision-making and be developed to ensure that all workplace parties can be made aware of the process of how to apply; how to participate in the selection process of research priorities, and how to achieve increased accountability for the grant values assigned. WSPS further recommends a re-balancing of research grants and resources from pure research to evidence-based analysis of the efficacy of products, practices, solutions and technologies, and services.