

THE ROUTE TO OHS ACCREDITATION

Choosing the right accreditation program to ensure workers return home safely

BY MATTHEW BRADFORD

Occupational health and safety (OHS) programs are critical in construction. They not only uphold the highest standards of worker safety, they also allow contractors to pursue bidding opportunities and enjoy financial and production benefits. That said, there are several considerations to make when selecting an OH&S accreditation program.

Canadian contractors have two options when it comes to verifying their OHS approach. They include the Certificate of Recognition (COR) health and safety program, administered solely by Ontario's Infrastructure Health & Safety Association (IHSA), or the ISO-45001 certification, which is designated by several registrar bodies throughout the province.

"Both programs offer massive benefits if implemented and maintained properly," says Stephen Hall, ISO Lead Auditor Integrated Management Systems with Chain Reaction Strategy Inc. "That said, if you aren't getting everyone on board, or you're going about things half-heartedly, neither accreditation program is going to be successful for your company."

ISO VS. COR

Achieving either ISO-45001 or COR certification offers real, measurable benefits for construction firms. Not only are they bidding requirements for many public and private-sector projects, but these programs also help companies identify and embed the practices, protocols, and measures that have been proven to reduce jobsite injuries and their associated costs and delays. Moreover, programs like COR and ISO-45001 help companies stay up to speed with evolving health and safety regulations, are key for marketing and business development opportunities and help companies eliminate inefficiencies by continually improving procedures and policies.



STEPHEN HALL,
CHAIN REACTION STRATEGY INC.

However, there are key differences between each accreditation. COR, for one, is a national standard that varies from province to province. It is awarded by just one governing body in Ontario (IHSA) and has strict and specific qualifications that applicants must meet.

"COR is presently a much more prescriptive program than ISO-45001, but it's also much more defined. When you go through COR, you know what you have to do and what the IHSA will expect when it audits your program for its evaluation," says Hall. "So, if you're brand new to building a health and safety program, or you don't have a lot of time to build one from scratch, you can do COR by yourself because it more clearly lays out the expectations."

ISO-45001, on the other hand, is an international standard that does not vary between countries. It is less prescriptive than COR and awarded by several registrar bodies in Ontario.

The fact that ISO-45001 has less-defined requirements for accreditation may make it more appealing to firms. However, it's important to do one's homework or seek support from a consultant to ensure no critical elements are being omitted or overlooked in the process.

Both COR and ISO provide roadmaps for creating safer construction jobsites. Selecting one comes down to how much assistance, resources, and knowledge companies have, or will require, when establishing their H&S program.

"Ultimately," Hall adds, "what matters most when choosing an accreditation program is that you're committed to doing it right and that the program fits with your company."

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Regardless of which accreditation program you choose, a strong Health & Safety Management System is fundamental for establishing proven practices that ensure workers come home safe and projects run smoothly. But the benefits extend far beyond health and safety.

“Simply put, implementing structure within your business is good for your business,” says Hall. “If you take the process seriously, and you embed meaningful health and safety measures; that’s not only going to provide your business with more opportunities, it’s going to reduce your injuries, enhance morale and create a more supportive and productive culture within your workforce.”

Granted, the success of an OHS program hinges on a company’s willingness and ability to keep it front and centre. This requires a top-down buy-in from business leaders supported by consistent messaging, ongoing training and a commitment at all levels to keep H&S practices from falling by the wayside.

“As soon as management has dissension over the program, then so does the entire company,” warns Hall. “On the other hand, when workers see that their leaders are buying into these programs, everybody falls in line behind them – especially when it’s made clear that this is a business priority and corrective actions will be addressed if individuals aren’t on board.”


That’s not to say OHS programs can (or should) be enforced through fear of punishment. Instead, Hall suggests the most effective way of maintaining support for OHS programs and the accreditation process is to be clear about the firm’s expectations, reward successes, and take measures to re-train or course-correct individuals who are not upholding their H&S responsibilities.

“You’re always going to get pushback, no matter what, but I have yet to see a client lose employees because they’ve implemented the health and safety programs,” says Hall.

“At the end of the day,” he continues, “if management stands firm on their convictions and makes a point of correcting bad habits, people will begin to see the benefits and do their part.”

Nevertheless, entropy is to be expected. Despite a firm’s efforts to establish and accredit an OHS program, every company faces the challenge of keeping their momentum going. This is where it pays to create a strategic plan with input from individuals throughout the company and involve all project stakeholders in ensuring OHS programs are alive and well in the field.

“The more people that you get involved with building and sustaining an OHS program, the more people are accountable for its success,” adds Hall. 💧



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