

## **The Benefits of an Occupational Health and Safety Professional to an Organization**

An effective health and safety program is crucial for an organization to ensure the safety of their employees. An organization is responsible for meeting safety legal requirements in order to protect their employees. A competent occupational health and safety (OHS) professional will establish an effective safety management system that will prevent incidents that cause harm to people, property and the environment. Safety professionals must be able to understand, interpret and implement complex safety regulations, acts and standards that require knowledge and experience. Thus, if an organization wants to effectively manage OHS, save direct and indirect costs of incidents and show their commitment to safety they should hire a certified safety professional. In Canada, the Board of Canadian Registered Safety Professionals is an accredited certification program that certifies OHS professionals as a Canadian Registered Safety Professional (CRSP) (BCRSP, 2016). A CRSP is an individual that has met the academic, experience and examination requirements of a national registration authority (BCRSP, 2016). A CRSP is committed to safety and their knowledge and skills are frequently advanced through a certification maintenance program.

An OHS professional will be responsible for creating and maintaining a healthy and safe work environment. Effective OHS in the workplace leads to direct and indirect benefits for an organization. Direct benefits include the prevention or reduction of injuries and incidents in the workplace as a result of various safety practices, such as risk assessments and safe work procedures. Also, complying with OHS legal requirements will prevent the organization from receiving penalties. Indirect benefits of OHS include increased work productivity, increased employee morale, and reduced health care and insurance costs.

Occupational health and safety professionals provide three fundamental benefits to an organization. First, OHS professionals promote a health and safe working environment for all employees within an organization through an effective safety management system. Second, OHS professionals offer expert knowledge of health and safety matters, such as being able to interpret OHS regulations and apply them to the worksite. Third, OHS professionals enhance organizational performance and success.

An OHS professional implements and maintains an effective safety management system to prevent and control hazards in the workplace and report incidents in compliance with legal requirements. An effective safety management system includes but is not limited to: an OHS program and policies, safe work procedures, education and training, risk assessments to control hazards, inspections, incident investigations, and continuous monitoring and reviewing to ensure the current system is effective.

All safety initiatives that are a part of the safety management system rely on effective communication to educate all levels of employees at an organization. For example, risk assessments are conducted by an OHS professional, where the hazards were identified and evaluated to determine suitable controls to be implemented (Camplin, 2011). However, in order for a risk assessment to be effective the OHS professional must communicate the controls to eliminate or mitigate hazards to management and to the employees in order to educate workers on the importance of safety.

An OHS professional is a leader that enhances safety culture through effective communication (Vecchio-Sadus, 2007). Safety culture refers to the shared values and attitudes, and patterns of behaviours that determine the commitment to an organization's

OHS program (Booth & Lee, 1995). A positive safety culture in an organization reduces accidents for workers and improves the bottom line for managers (Camplin, 2011).

An OHS professional will encourage employees to report hazards and be involved in developing safe work procedures. Involving employees in safety matters and responding to their safety concerns aids to create common goals between employees, management, and the OHS professional and motivates employees to work safely (Vecchio-Sadus, 2007).

Various forms of safety communication include: an organization's OHS policy and OHS program, safe work procedures, safety statistics, education and training, risk assessments and incident investigation reports (Vecchio-Sadus, 2007). An OHS professional can influence employees to perform their job tasks safely by empowering the workers through education and training.

An OHS professional has the knowledge, skills and ability to implement safety programs and procedures that show the organization's commitment to the health and safety of their employees. An OHS professional has the knowledge to make recommendations to supervisors and managers on what controls should be implemented to control hazards (Camplin, 2011). Controls are chosen based on the hierarchy of controls. The hierarchy of controls in the order of most effective to least effective: (1) elimination or substitution of a hazardous process; (2) engineering controls (e.g., barriers); (3) administrative controls (e.g., job rotation and training); (4) and personal protective equipment (e.g., respirators). Thus, OHS professionals must have knowledge of a wide variety of hazards (physical, chemical and biological) and controls in order to protect workers. Also, OHS professionals have extensive knowledge in disability case management where they collaboratively work with employees, supervisors, provincial or federal

regulators and health care professionals to promptly return an ill or injured worker back to work.

An effective safety management system is an integral part of a successful business. Commitment to safety is an important indicator of how organizations invest in their employees (Khushrushahi, n.d.). An OHS professional contributes to a successful organization by demonstrating the company is socially responsible; upholding the company's values and image; increasing the productivity of workers; and enhancing employee morale which leads to an increase in worker's motivation to work hard (ISHM, 2014).

Several companies' prioritize corporate social responsibility (CSR), which means going beyond legal compliance and acting responsibly towards people, planet and profit (McDonnell & Joyce, 2015). A strong safety culture can have positive effects on an organization's CSR. Poor safety at an organization can have adverse effects on a company's CSR and financial status. For example, high rates of accidents can ruin an organization's reputation and can lead to a loss of sales and an inability to attract and retain highly skilled employees. Therefore, having a competent OHS professional will promote safety, which leads to an organization that is socially responsible and successful.

Further, OHS professionals add value to an organization through the reduction in costs associated with work interruption through safety practices that prevent injuries and illnesses and management of injuries. An OHS professional will reduce injury rates and time loss through safety initiatives. Also, OHS includes disability case management where the purpose is to optimize recovery and facilitate the prompt return to work for injured or ill employees. Prevention and prompt recovery of injured workers saves costs including:

wage loss, insurance administration fees; retention of skilled and experienced workers; premiums; rehabilitation costs; loss of productivity; replacement of workers; training; and social costs.

In conclusion, every organization will be able to receive the direct and indirect benefits, such as reduction in injury rates and increase in job productivity if they invest in hiring a certified OHS professional. Any company can have a safety program; however implementation of an effective safety management system requires a competent OHS professional. Thus, an OHS professional's safety initiatives will not only be a representative of the organization's commitment to safety but also will increase productivity and reduce costs for an organization.

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