



PROTECTING THE PUBLIC:

THE NEED TO DEVELOP & IMPLEMENT A NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH & SAFETY PRACTITIONERS

by: Peter Sturm

WHAT IS THE ROLE AND PURPOSE OF A REGULATORY BODY?

Ensure:

- Promoting competent and ethical practitioners in the profession
- Members maintain their competence and practice in a way that minimizes risk to the public
- Safety practitioners uphold the standards of the profession
- Public confidence in the profession

There's been much discussion over the years about the need to formally adopt a national OHS practitioner framework for health and safety practitioners in Canada. Numerous stakeholders' positions have been clearly articulated and one of the strongest individual advocates is long-time CSSE member and former President, Peter Sturm.

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For more than a decade, the safety profession around the world has discussed and developed a global framework of competencies for health and safety practitioners,” says Peter.

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“We know that the identified competencies include the skills, knowledge, and experience to be the best safety practitioners and, of course, we need to develop an accepted—and more importantly put into practice—a safety practitioner path aligned to a framework in Canada. I have to say we are not quite there yet, but it is getting closer to reality.”

Why isn't there one accepted and in-practice competency framework across Canada?

To achieve this requires alignment and agreement at all levels across multiple jurisdictions and uniform agreement on the agreed-to competencies for a health and safety practitioner. The adoption and acceptance by everyone of an accepted global framework for OHS professional practice in Canada would be greatly beneficial for practitioners and the public. This work is in progress, and needs to land in every jurisdiction in Canada. Health and safety legislation in Canada aligns at the provincial level, however it is practised across the country and needs to be consistently practised.

Peter notes several positive aspects under the framework.

“The first is transportability and consistency of practice. This includes setting us up and moving towards a regulated profession. By integrating a national capability framework, it provides consistent safety generalists standards and practice in each Canadian province and territory.”

Beyond that, adopting a safety profession framework makes it easier for individuals to develop a personal path that includes the recognized skills, knowledge and education to fill important OHS positions/roles that are applicable across the country. To date, many practitioners may consider themselves as competent, and do not compare their capabilities to a standard

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and, therefore, may be doing things with limited or less than ideal knowledge, education, and skills. Under an accepted profession framework, it will be “easier “for individuals to compare to, enhance their capabilities and evolve to follow a path of becoming the best possible and competent practitioner.

Another advantageous aspect is a clear path for practitioners who currently don’t have direction as to where to go for educational programs or training. A framework provides alignment to the best school offerings, best area of practice, etc., as well as “how to” advice to build their career path and self-assess what’s important to them in their practice. Discussions around the framework address educational requirements and how schools can provide the best learning offerings (opportunities) for those considering a career in safety.

“Other professionals such as doctors or engineers select a path during their career,” says Peter. “For example, they have their basic training or general competencies and arrive at a personal decision point as to where they can choose areas of specialty as their next steps and/or identify different areas of interest in their practice.” An OHS practitioner, through a national capability framework, can advance from a general practitioner or decide to start to specialize in specialties such as hygiene, ergonomics, auditing, safety leadership, safety culture, sustainability, etc.

As there is a “gigantic” gap presently in the availability of degree or graduate OHS programs in Canada, Peter points out that efforts expended for the last 10 years are bringing consistency to higher levels of education standards among safety educational programs. “These efforts—for example through a National Education

Symposium with the Board of Canadian Registered Safety Professionals (BCRSP)—I believe advances a type of collaborative and multi-stakeholder initiative that aggressively continues to move educational programs that are aligned with the profession’s competencies to the next level.”

On a positive note, some safety practitioners are already earmarking for themselves various areas of interest or specialty in their practice. Under a national competency alignment and national regulated profession model, individual practitioners can choose an enhanced career path with areas of specialty or interest, mirroring that of other practitioners and can easily be developed for our profession.

NEXT STEPS FOR CSSE

For Peter, a high priority is to commit to action in implementing the best innovative safety educational offerings and creating the business case for degree and graduate programs at our schools across the country. This will set our profession to meet the requirements of a regulated profession.

“We are behind in competency-aligned educational program offerings and we have been talking about it for 30 years. We are seeing that academic institutions are evolving to safety-specific degrees and post-graduate programs at our colleges and universities. We have pockets of great educational offerings in some provinces, and the opportunity for every practitioner to have access to the best educational offerings will occur.

For me personally, after exhausting an OHS certificate and post-baccalaureate degree in OHS, my only available path was to complete an Executive MBA in Global Leadership. I hope that we will build on our existing and very good technical safety education programs across the country, and move to the next level of occupational safety-

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specific degrees, graduate and doctoral programs. The advanced higher learning topics would also include the present suite of safety offerings and expand to include safety leadership, governance, finance, systems thinking, strategy, marketing, and strategic operations, to name a few. These are elements included in the competency framework that can help us develop the profession and meet the requirements of a regulated profession.”

Building on what has been developed to date supports action in delivering the message to government, regulators, and businesses across our country the fact that safety practitioners protect the public every day. The urgency is in enabling health and safety practitioners to work within the requirements of a regulated profession and—not to forget—that “every workplace needs a safety practitioner.” Would any organization run a business without finance, operations or human resources expertise? Why do we continue to see workplaces without a competent safety practitioner to protect employees as valued human assets that impact the profit line and business success of every company?

Across Canada, the implications for becoming a viable, relevant and recognized regulated profession are significant. Peter passionately stresses the importance of everyone in all jurisdictions working collaboratively across Canada for the achievable goals of safe and productive workplaces.



“If we want to be successful, we need to work together because we all work in different places and situations and we simply won’t solve anything individually. It’s going to be done collectively. We don’t want to miss any opportunities in moving our current and future practitioners forward in this direction. We want them to be successful. This success is across our great country, in every territory and province and at every workplace to promote the best safety standards through the best qualified and effective practitioners in safety, while doing it with everyone in a collaborative environment.”

