

In today's varied and globalized workplaces, new risks and challenges are presented to employees on a daily basis, posing a wide array of issues and concerns that may impact their health and well-being. In response to this, a centralized focus on health and safety should be of utmost importance to companies in order to inform and protect their employees. A dedicated health and safety professional, in administrating and organizing this aspect of the workplace, can bestow numerous benefits to their organization. Organization is a broader term than "company" or "business," rather is any group of people with a common purpose. It follows that having a safety professional can benefit any group in all industries. Every work sector, from manufacturing and construction to retail and food service, can take advantage of an occupational health professional.

Before discussing the benefits a safety professional can grant, there should first be a distinction drawn between those who are certified, trained and educated in the particulars of safety, and those who are not. Safety professionals, as defined by the Board of Certified Safety Professionals (2013), are those who:

*...identify hazards and evaluate them for the potential to cause injury or illness to people or harm of property and the environment. The safety professional recommends administrative and engineering controls that eliminate or minimize the risk and danger posed by hazards. They work with professionals in other disciplines in many different job settings. They work for companies, government agencies and private organizations or offer individual professional services. They may engage in design, planning, program management, training, audit and other aspects of practice. Additionally, they apply hazard recognition, evaluation and control knowledge and skills for equipment, systems, facilities and processes, or*

*in operations, manufacturing, transportation, construction, insurance services and other enterprises.*

As indicated, the safety professional is tasked with a wide array of responsibilities, and needs to be experienced with a multitude of skills and knowledge. Despite this, many safety management positions or similar titles are filled by available internal staff. Although a manager or other staff employee might have intimate knowledge of the company's particulars, because they have not completed the same education and training of a certified safety specialist, they may not be well-informed in the breadth of essential health and safety topics. These include, but are not limited to, risk assessment, physical and biological hazard reduction and prevention, ergonomics, accident assessment, fire and emergency management, provincial and federal law and regulatory requirements: topics that are not generally covered in standard education, and yet are vital for one to maintain safe working environments. Organizations may not realize the significant impact that a qualified safety professional can have, and instead hire for convenience or compliance. However, there are both direct and indirect distinct benefits realized by companies that utilize experienced, trained occupational health specialists.

An occupational health professional presents an organization with a variety of direct benefits that stem from their expertise in health and safety and their ability to identify and mitigate hazardous scenarios before they can lead to disastrous outcomes. A properly trained occupational health professional can identify a wide range of problems, including those presented from the environment, the work place, the tools and equipment on site, as well as behavioural risks and managerial decisions. With the right support from management and employees, they can work to solve these issues in a proactive manner. Further, from an economic standpoint, "The benefits from safety expenditures are the costs that are not incurred, or the

savings made, as a result of the reduced severity or frequency of accidents, and the possible increases in productivity associated with such measures” (Bequele 1984). By reducing risk and ensuring safe, organized and well-planned work processes, fewer accidents will occur, which prevents lost time, injury, damaged property and the repercussions of breached regulatory requirements. According to the 2011/2012 Staying@Work Survey Report, “employers are finding [that a] strengthened commitment [to occupational health and safety] can have positive effects on their organization and bottom line.” Through the survey they also found “nearly two-thirds of companies with highly effective health and productivity programs (66%) report they perform better than their top competitors, versus 50% of companies with ineffective programs.” Moreover, “industry-adjusted average revenues per employee...are 40% higher than for low-effectiveness companies, a difference of \$132,000 per employee,” and they discovered “an annual health care cost differential of \$551 per employee among Canadian respondents” (Towers Watson 2011). There were also “fewer lost days due to unplanned absences and disability”, and “reductions in at least some health risks (tobacco use and sedentary lifestyles/physical inactivity) as well as lower voluntary turnover rates” (Towers Watson 2011). This highlights how an occupational health professional, administering a sound program, can make a noticeable difference to an organization, reducing damages, promoting health and saving money.

There are also positive indirect benefits of an occupational health professional’s work. As explored by Camplin (2011), “A sound safety management program not only addresses risk management and legal compliance, but it also includes innovation and opportunities that benefit all stakeholders”, which in this case refers to not only stockholders, but everyone who is affected by the organization. There is an aspect of social responsibility inherent to safety, and trained professionals, as part of their work in promoting safe environments and behaviours, improve

safety climate by inspiring other employees in the endeavour to create a safe workplace. It is always important to remember that safety is not achieved by the efforts of one person alone; everyone needs to contribute to a safe workplace in their own fashion. An organization with a strong safety climate is one with “genuine and consistent management commitment to safety,... [formal, informal and regular pervasive] communication about safety issues... [and] involvement of employees, including empowerment [and] delegation of responsibility for safety” (Mearns 2003). To reach a responsible, ethical level of universal safety, everyone must work together towards the common goal; a safety professional can influence the very climate of their organization and direct it as a whole to proactively think and care about the health and safety of its employees, its customers and its environment. This cultural shift can be cultivated by a qualified professional, which has far-reaching implications for the entirety of the organization and its future.

To conclude, there are both direct and indirect benefits to having a health and safety professional in any organization. Well-implemented programs, and the development of a climate of safety, provide an organization with an economic benefit in addition to being ethical, legally compliant and promoting a healthier workplace. The educated, trained, and certified safety professional brings the skills required to effectively start and maintain these programs and to develop an ingrained climate of safety. A health and safety professional is not only an asset to an organization, but is a necessary component of an effective and prosperous workplace.

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