

CPO Discusses Progress & Next Steps in the Ontario OHS Reform Movement



In Aug. 2011, George Gritziotis was announced as Ontario's first Chief Prevention Officer (CPO). He formally started work in Oct. 2011. About a year later, we again spoke to Gritziotis, who was one of the keynote speakers at the recent OHS Summit 2012, about what's next for the OHS reform movement in Ontario.

The Progress to Date

Although Gritziotis took office last October, his powers and authority under the revised *OHS Act* didn't kick in until April 1, 2012. In addition, he notes that it took a lot of time and effort to get the right people for the Prevention Council, which met for the first time in September. But Gritziotis is satisfied with the results and believes that the Council members have 'the kind of leadership to provide advice on the development of an integrated strategy for the province.'

We've accomplished a lot already, says Gritziotis. He explains that the Dean Report is the foundation for their strategy. The report includes 11 priority recommendations (see pages 75-6). Gritziotis points out that they've already implemented or are working toward addressing all of these recommendations.

Examples:

- New reprisal rules took effect April 1, permitting MOL inspectors to file a reprisal claim with the Ontario Labour Relations Board on a worker's behalf provided certain conditions are met. Gritziotis didn't have the data but said that any increase in reprisal claims by workers since that date can be viewed as a success because it means workers who felt endangered on the job were exercising their rights, which improves the system for all—including employers;
- A new health and safety poster was released and, as of Oct. 1, 2012, was

- required to be posted in all workplaces;
- Worker and supervisor awareness training programs have been developed and are being finalized. Gritziotis expects the programs and related regulations to be out in mid-2013; and
- Development of a new standard for work at heights is underway.

Next Steps

However, there's still a lot to do, admits Gritziotis. One of their next priorities is addressing vulnerable workers, including those who are young, old, new or immigrants. They've already taken some steps in this area, too.

For example, a new safety video contest is aimed at young workers. Gritziotis believes it's important to get the safety message out and engage youth by 'speaking their language' in mediums they like such as YouTube and other digital media. To reach immigrant workers, he notes that the new mandatory health and safety poster was released in 17 languages.

Another priority is the development of an integrated OHS strategy for the province, says Gritziotis. As the Dean Report explained, the various players can't continue to work in isolation. The components of the OHS system 'including prevention, education, compliance and enforcement' must all use consistent approaches and deliver consistent messages, he says.

That strategy will, in part, rely on the use of metrics. Gritziotis wants to put 'science behind the decisions.' But he stresses that the strategy 'must be nimble and flexible and shift as the environment shifts.' He hopes the new strategy will put them ahead of the needs and demands of the market.

It's also important, adds Gritziotis, to build innovative relationships with new partners, who can help increase the system's capacity. These relationships can help the province get more for the money invested in OHS. For instance, he wants to leverage employers with successful OHS programs to play a role in encouraging employers who are struggling, particularly those with small businesses. He also wants to integrate health and safety into existing training programs, whether in colleges, business schools, apprenticeships or trades programs.

Although the employers Gritziotis has spoken to are supportive of the reform movement, there are still challenges to making the necessary changes. The stakeholders are a diverse group, he notes, so they must find common ground. But he also sees this diversity as an opportunity to educate each other and share various points of view. By doing so, they can develop 'trust and transparency,' which are essential for success.

Gritziotis and the Council are meeting again on Dec. 4 to discuss the next steps, including transferring the prevention elements of the system from the WSIB to the MOL. But the reform movement is stakeholder-driven, he believes. So the consultation process will include a multipronged approach so 'we can reach out and engage everyone in the prevention discussion, no matter where they work in this province,' he explains. *Bottom line:* If you're involved in workplace safety and have an idea, they want to hear it. As Gritziotis says, 'The more voices we hear, the better off we are.'