

# Safety Charter Only Meaningful if Backed up by Real Action



Several jurisdictions in Canada, such as [BC](#), [NL](#) and [SK](#), have safety leadership charters that company executives, such as CEOs, owners or members of senior management, can sign to declare their commitment to the health and safety of their employees.

There's also a country-wide safety leadership charter from the [Conference Board of Canada](#) that's based on five principles:

1. I subscribe to the principle that health and safety of my employees, contractors, visitors and our surrounding community are an integral part of our business strategies, processes and performance measures.
2. I strive to provide leadership for ongoing health and safety improvements, internal capacity for my team to eliminate, minimize or control hazards in our workplace.
3. I agree to provide an environment that enables all employees to participate and work collaboratively in developing, promoting and improving health and safety at work.
4. I aim to extend health and safety efforts beyond the workplace, recognizing and supporting related initiatives within the community and our families.
5. I commit to lead and participate mindfully within my organization's health and safety framework, improving

health and safety strategies, programming and performance.

So if a company executive signs one of these safety charters, does it really mean anything' Or is it just a chance for a photo op and some good press'

We recently asked you that very question and here's what you had to say:

- Maybe, if it's backed up with real actions. (65%)
- Yes, it shows a commitment to workplace safety. (31%)
- No, it's just a publicity stunt. (4%)

It's clear that safety professionals believe that signing a safety leadership charter is just an empty gesture unless executives really back the OHS program and safety initiatives in the workplace with concrete actions.

For example, [safety culture starts at the top of the company](#)'that is, senior management sets the tone for the workplace. Publicly declaring their commitment to workplace safety by signing a safety charter is a good start toward developing a good safety culture but it needs to be supported by things like an adequate safety budget and support for safety initiatives, policies and programs that go beyond mere compliance with the OHS laws.

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[learn\_more caption="BC Safety Charter Response" state="open"]

Dear Robin,

Thank you for your article and comments [Safety Charter Only Meaningful if Backed up by Real Action] about the value of safety charters and the need to ensure they are followed by concrete actions.

As you say in your article, without the tools, mechanisms and commitment to follow up, a CEO's signature on a piece of paper is indeed nothing more than that ' an unfulfilled commitment.

If safety charters are to have any value at all they must include measureable commitments and consequences for not fulfilling them. At the BC Safety Charter we have taken the approach that before signing the Charter CEOs must first read and agree to our six expectations of them.

Along with five commitments to actively support and promote the Charter and what it stands for, members are asked to 'Set an example by embarking on or enhancing an existing Health & Safety Management program such as OSSE, COR, ISO or similar program.'

There is however, a danger, of using too punitive an approach to promoting health and safety which, as we have all learned, only goes so far. It is all about companies getting better rather than being perfect.

But to your point – the only real measure of the success of a safety charter is on the shop floor where lower injury rates are the only meaningful result.

Ben Hume  
Steering Committee Chair  
BC Safety Charter

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