



Interview with the Honourable Steven W. Mahoney, P.C.,
Chair, Ontario Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, Toronto.

View from the Top



bh IN BRIEF

ROAD TO ZERO

In 2006, about 1,000 people died on the job in Canada, including 331 in Ontario. Mr. Mahoney spoke about *The Road to Zero*, a very important new campaign for the WSIB. "Zero" means no deaths and no injuries, a bold and ambitious vision.

Innovative initiatives involving CEOs across Canada and local political champions are helping to raise awareness and energise change. Smaller business can do their part by elevating health and safety to the top rank of their many priorities.

1. Will *The Road to Zero* strategy encourage a quantum leap in safety, or is continued slow progress more likely?

We are attempting to create a "habit" in terms of health and safety, particularly from the top down. Of course, this includes small businesses. This is a long-term goal requiring both persistent leadership from the WSIB, and practical steps by employers to understand and mobilize this vision. Our message is:

"There are no accidents. Accidents are not a cost of doing business and they are preventable."

2. What interim goals have been set for the campaign, and how will the WSIB sustain interest and momentum over the next five years?

We are reaching out in many areas. In addition to supporting the CEO Charter and its 250 members, another very important initiative is our Community Health and Safety Charter. Our goal is to make mayors and town councilors local champions, and take the message not only into companies, but also to their communities. So far, we have a number of cities and towns on board, the most recent being Guelph. Ontario municipalities pay us \$100 million annually to care for their injured workers. That's way too big to go unnoticed. To close the loop, those municipalities also need to talk to their Chambers of Commerce.

3. Do you think Workers' Compensation Boards are gaining ground on the importance of safety and prevention?

There are many examples where behaviours and attitudes have changed in safety; think of seatbelts, and helmet use for bikes, motorcycles, and now even tobogganing. We have made tremendous strides to control drinking and driving. We know our current television campaign is blunt, but it is getting the message out. There have been 100,000 hits on our own website and two million more on YouTube.

Still, we need to keep it fresh and reach more people. In the future, another theme will emphasize the tremendous impact injury has on families. While there are many good examples of companies that have made safety a core concern, we can't get complacent and tell everyone that all's well.

4. To what extent do Workers' Compensation Boards across Canada coordinate their strategies, activities and marketing campaigns?

Of course, each jurisdiction has its own legislation. We do share best practices, and our association (www.awcbc.org) meets several times a year. We are partnering with the WCB of British Columbia to help improve our administrative efficiency.

More important though, is the need for political backing, meaning the support of the Premier and the Minister of Labour. We have it here, and that makes all the difference.

5. Smaller businesses seem to have a disproportionate share of injuries. Why is this?

Small businesses are unique, especially the really small ones with less than twenty employees. Every day, they scramble to just "drain the swamp". They worry about cash flow, staffing, growth, paying bills, and making a living. It may be as simple as this: health and safety is too far down their priority list. The good news is that some companies now report "close calls", and when these get talked about, preventative efforts can then get mobilized. We're also working with The Canadian Federation of Independent Business, which helps get that voice to our table.

In truth, we want the WSIB to be a partner to businesses of all sizes. We want companies to say: "Our people matter; safety is the way we work." That's fertile ground for our considerable resources.