

The Compass

Taking safety
to the C-suite

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ISO 45001

Developing a
World-Class Standard



By Victor M. Toy

It can be argued that things of significance often take time. The development of an ISO standard for occupational health and safety management system (OHSMS) is a perfect example. The standard has long been in the making and may well be one of the most pivotal OSH standards in decades once it is complete.

This has been a journey, not just of 3 years (the time selected for its development), but of 20. The movement for an international OHSMS began in the mid 1990s. Since then, we have seen tremendous growth in country-specific OSH management system standards, including ANSI Z10, for which ASSE is secretariat. According to a 2005 survey by the OHSAS project group, which developed the groundbreaking OHSAS 18001 standard, more than 100,000 organizations around the world have obtained certification to OHSMS standards. Many more self-declare or use the OHSMS principles to manage their safety and health risks.

Given this, it is logical to ask why an ISO standard is needed. Two major thoughts provide some insight. First, far too many injuries, illnesses and work-related fatalities continue to occur. According to the [International Labor Organization \(ILO\)](#), 2.3 million people die globally each year due to occupational injuries and illnesses. This does not include the number of nonfatal and debilitating injuries and illnesses, let alone near-hits. Second,

work has changed immensely in the past 2 decades. Business is much more globally connected. Organizations are more integrated than ever with worldwide operations, including some in areas that present differing levels of risks and controls. Even organizations without international operations are affected by the products they buy from other countries.

ISO 45001: Its Significance

Thus, the first question is, Why is this standard so significant? The simple answer is that it is the first true global consensus standard developed by ISO member countries with important contributions from key liaison organizations including ILO. While standards such as [OHSAS 18001](#) and [ANSI/ASSE Z10](#) may be used globally, this development carries the key ingredient of globally diverse groups coming together to establish what will be the foundation for managing safety and health performance around the world.

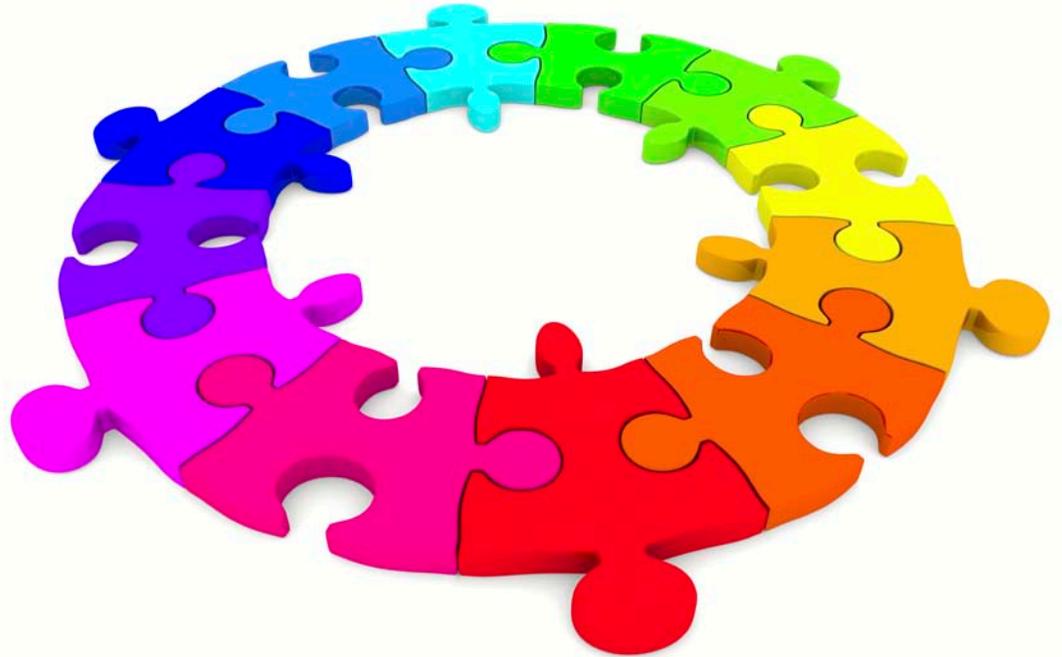
Furthermore, this standard may well change how OSH professionals manage safety and health within an organization by integrating these practices with an organization's goals, objectives and processes as a part of (not separate from) the fabric of business operations and plans. It is intended as a framework for the organization's management

system for OSH, not as a program administered and implemented solely by the safety department.

The standard has all the right components, many of which are found in existing management system standards or those programs implemented by high-performing organizations. The standard calls for leadership with participation from workers at all levels who are engaged in work or work activities controlled by the organization. Risks and opportunities (for improvement) are identified and assessed via strategic, tactical and operational plans with objectives for maintaining and improving OSH performance. This includes contingency planning for changes and emergencies.

It also contains the necessary requirements for supporting the system, such as allocation of human and financial resources, competencies and documentation that helps ensure continuity of process. Records are required to allow for the assessment of performance against the standard's requirements and other requirements that the organization voluntarily adopts. This assessment enhances the ability to identify areas of risk and opportunities. Top management reviews help ensure that potential changes in business strategies and the assessment of OSH performance deliver the desired results in addition to identifying areas for continuous improvements.

While many of these concepts exist in current practices, what makes this standard special is that it reflects a diversity of opinions and methods from around the world regarding the best ways to construct an OSH management system. This standard will move the bar and establish minimum requirements for managing safety risks. ASSE continues to support the need for a global ISO standard for OHSMS.



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Next Steps

The standard is in the fourth of six stages; it will likely be released mid to late 2017. It is important to note that ISO 45001 shares about 50% of the same language as ISO 14001 (Environmental Management System) and ISO 9001 (Quality Management System). These two standards were updated in September 2015. This is good news for those considering an integrated approach with these disciplines, as this harmonization will make it easier for an organization to adopt ISO 45001 and improve how it manages OSH.

ISO 45001 is a perhaps one of the most significant developments in safety in the past 50 years. It presents an opportunity for the safety profession to move the needle on managing risks and making a positive impact on organizations. For more information, visit [ASSE's ISO 45001 website](#).

Victor M. Toy, CSP, CIH, is chair of the **U.S. Technical Advisory Group** to Project Committee 283 on ISO 45001. He is president and principal consultant for Insyst OH&S in San Mateo, CA. Prior to this he was manager, global transformation and strategy, for IBM's Integrated Health Services.





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Officers

Administrator

Anita Muller

anita.muller@compass-usa
.com

Assistant Administrator

Maureen M. Johnson, CSP
maureensafe@gmail.com

Content Coordinator

Open

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ASSE Staff

Manager, Practice Specialties

Charlyn Haguwood
chaguwood@asse.org

Communications Team

Tina Angley
Cathy Baker
Brendan Hilliard
Sue Trebswether
COPSPublications@asse.org