



# COR Toolkit:

## An Employer Guide to COR Certification



**Certificate of Recognition  
(COR) Program**



Suite 450, One Bentall Centre  
505 Burrard Street, P.O. Box 59  
Vancouver, BC V7X 1M3  
Tel 604 633 9787  
Fax 604 633 9796  
[www.go2hr.ca](http://www.go2hr.ca)

The purpose of this document is to help employers understand the Certificate of Recognition (COR) process, giving an overview of what is needed to succeed, providing detailed explanations of the audit tool's questions and giving practical examples of forms, policies and procedures that companies can use or modify based on their specific needs. By following this manual, companies can expect to improve their safety performance and reduce costs.

Common themes running through this manual include the importance of:

- a formal safety management system (SMS), as opposed to a random collection of safety activities
- open communication across all levels of an organization
- effective, fair, documented supervision that does not swamp a supervisor with paperwork
- an effective safety culture that helps all employees buy into the SMS
- promoting safety as an integral part of the business for all employees, rather than "something only a safety person does."

The manual is divided into three main sections: this introduction, which summarizes setting up an SMS; detailed explanations of each of the nine elements of the COR process, with tips and resources to help interpret the audit tool; and a final section that collects the various forms and templates that employers can use or modify.

Of the nine elements, eight pertain to the Occupational Health & Safety (OHS) audit, and the ninth deals with the Injury Management/Return to Work (IM/RTW) audit. Each of these sections contains:

- an overview of the element and its importance in ensuring a safe and healthy workplace
- relevant links to the OHS Regulation or the Workers' Compensation Act
- a list of resources supporting the element – such as booklets, brochures, posters, web sites (go2HR, WorkSafeBC, and other reliable sources)
- topic-relevant external training options for employers
- a list of questions from the audit tool for each element with a clear description of what an auditor looks for in each question
- a list of any relevant documentation required, as well as sample resources, such as policies, checklists, forms, etc.
- best practices from leading employers on effective and practical approaches to safety, focusing on the approaches auditors look for when on site.

## Overview of the COR Program

The COR Program is a voluntary incentive program for employers in BC. Employers enrolled in the COR program develop management systems in OHS and RTW. By implementing these systems and verifying them through audits, employers can earn rebates up to 15 per cent of their WorkSafeBC premiums. The COR program consists of two elements:

- the Occupational Health and Safety Certificate of Recognition (OHS COR)
- the Injury Management/Return-to-Work Certificate of Recognition (IM/RTW COR), which may be earned at the same time as the OHS COR, or subsequently.

The OHS COR recognizes that an employer has implemented an OHS management system that exceeds regulatory requirements, and ensures that there are comprehensive management systems in place to provide a safe work environment. This is the foundation of the COR Program.

The IM/RTW COR is awarded to employers who have built injury management/return-to-work programs into their health and safety management systems. Return-to-work programs are a proactive way for employers to help injured workers stay at work or return to productive and safe employment as soon as physically possible. These programs are based on the fact that many injured workers can safely perform productive work during the process of recovery. Returning to work is part of the workers' therapy and recovery, and workers who participate in a return-to-work program have better long-term health outcomes than those who don't.

When the company believes it is ready to proceed with the certification audit, it selects an external auditor. Auditors are experienced in the industry and in safety culture. Through the on-site audit process they develop a comprehensive picture of the situation and can provide meaningful recommendations to help a company improve further. The auditor measures the entire company's performance using the go2HR COR audit tool. For any topic that does not meet the standard, the auditor writes a clear recommendation to the company to help meet the requirements. If the company achieves 80 per cent, overall, and 50 per cent in each element of the audit, it is awarded COR certification. If the company is not successful the first time, it can use the auditor's recommendations to improve its system and try again until it is successful.

On the first and second anniversaries of certification, the company performs a maintenance audit using the same audit tool. This audit is usually performed by a certified internal auditor, a designated employee who acts as the company's safety champion. In the third year after certification, an external auditor is again selected to perform a full external audit. This audit cycle repeats in subsequent years. A key thing to remember is that there is a full audit every calendar year.

## Benefits of COR certification

There are three main reasons to seek COR certification:

- annual financial incentives paid by WorkSafeBC
- reduced assessment payments as a result of improved safety performance and experience rating
- indirect financial benefits of the program achieved through higher productivity, lower turnover rate, and overall reduction in physical and human operating cost.

Financial incentives are provided to employers who achieve COR certification and who are in good standing with WorkSafeBC. Employers earning the OHS COR receive rebates of 10 percent of their WorkSafeBC base assessment. Employers earning the IM/RTW COR can receive additional rebates of five percent of their WorkSafeBC base assessment.

Even more significant than financial incentives associated with certification, however, are the costs avoided by preventing workplace injury and illness, which in turn directly results in lower claim costs and reduced WorkSafeBC assessment premiums. A safe company can achieve up to a 50 per cent discount on the base assessment rate, compared to a 100 per cent surcharge on the base rate assessed on a company with poor safety performance. This means a top-level safety performer would only pay one quarter the annual assessment of the worst performers. Savings of this level can be substantial.

The successful implementation of the OHS and the IM/RTW systems also contributes to a change in business culture. When employers recognize that health and safety are just as important as other critical business factors (production, quality and profit, etc.), a safer workplace will result. Safer workplaces lead to lower employee turnover and higher employee morale, and these factors in turn lead to higher customer satisfaction.

## Implementation and Maintenance of a Safety Management System

Safety management systems are no more difficult to set up and maintain than any other system, be they accounting, maintenance or human resources. This resource manual is designed to help companies with even minimal safety experience achieve COR certification in a timely and efficient manner. Reviewing this material is an important early step in the process. go2HR is available to help companies, both by direct consultation and by providing training to each company's safety champions. A company can achieve success in five steps.

The first step is for all senior managers to make an unconditional commitment to safety. They must not only say, but actually believe, that all injuries are preventable and that excellence in safety is necessary for excellence in business. Actions must always support these beliefs.

The second step is for managers and supervisors to be personally involved in safety activities, such as meetings, inspections and giving feedback when observing workers. This is the main

component of the safety system, but cannot occur in isolation. Safety champions frequently set up easy tools for supervisors to use for this purpose.

The third step involves empowering employees to have a substantial voice in safety actions. They must hold themselves and others accountable for actions and take pride in achievements. If a company responds negatively to employee concerns, this step quickly fails.

Fourth, an objective evaluation of actions is needed to encourage positive behaviour and reduce the negative. These systems must be fairly and consistently applied every time. This is a key that leads to continual improvement.

Finally, there must be established an effective reporting system that employees can and will use. It must focus on correcting issues and weaknesses before an injury or incident occurs, but also be able to help the company learn from experience when something goes wrong.

## **Importance of Communication**

There is no single factor more important than communication in a safety management system. The safety champion could build the world's best SMS, but if management and workers never know about it, it will be useless. As with all systems, management needs to communicate expectations to workers, coach them and train them. Workers need to be engaged in the company, communicating not only when things are wrong (unsafe, unusual, unexpected or unknown) but when things are going well. The communication needs to be open and without fear of reprisal. Management needs to close the loop with workers and let them know how their issue is being handled.

The most common and effective method is simple informal talk, either one-on-one or in small groups. Signs, posters and message boards are semi-formal methods. Written policies, procedures and forms are the most formal methods of communication. Each company needs a balance of these methods and also needs to establish a system of recording communication when it happens. The manager's notebook, whether paper or electronic, is a very useful tool. Simple, short notes that a particular worker was observed doing something (right, neutral or wrong) and that subsequent feedback was given can support more formal evaluation records. For minor issues, these notes may be the only record that anything even happened. They can establish patterns of behaviour by the supervisor or a particular worker that can be vital in investigations.

The best communications are not categorized as "safety" or "not safety." Each discussion about how to do a job properly is essentially a mini-safety meeting. Safety is just another part of the overall business, and open communication is critical to its success.

## **Effective Supervision**

Effective supervision is an absolute key to workplace safety. In this context, supervision means someone who controls, instructs and directs people below them. It is not necessary to have the title of supervisor to be one. Most managers in hospitality are supervisors, as are some lead

hands. Supervisors are legally responsible for the health and safety of their workers and are required by regulation to teach, train, inform, coach, watch, correct and even discipline them appropriately.

The number one trait of effective supervision is integrity. The supervisor needs always to act above the standards they are asking of their workers. They need to follow every safety rule to the letter, or better, and always have every required piece of personal protective equipment not only on but in good condition.

## **Safety Culture**

Formally, a company's safety culture is its shared beliefs, values, behaviour and attitudes. It is what the employees will do or say when they know no one is watching or listening. It is the consistent belief at all levels that all injuries are preventable and that incidents cannot simply be blamed on worker negligence by default. It is the belief that safe, happy employees have a positive impact on business. Safety is not a cost-benefit calculation, but always a benefit. There can be no cutting corners, and the job must be done right the first time, every time.

Safety culture is something anyone without much industry experience can quickly spot, but even specialists struggle to define exactly what it is and how to measure it. People in the industry can usually tell within minutes of stepping onto company property if a business is running a tight ship. It shows in the little things, like housekeeping details in less public areas, crisp uniforms on maintenance staff, and everything put away in back-of-the-house areas. Tight companies are safer, have a lower environmental impact, lower costs and higher profitability, lower employee turnover, and higher employer loyalty and morale. New hires quickly adopt the culture of the organization, and they rarely consciously realize what aspects of the culture have had a subtle but crucial impact on them.

## **COR Process and Continual Improvement**

One of the principles of COR is continual improvement. The 80 per cent minimum standard for COR certification is only the start of the next phase of the safety journey. The company needs to make a commitment that the only acceptable outcome is ultimately preventing any workplace injury or illness. This very lofty goal can only be approached slowly and systematically, dealing with all remaining issues identified in audits or by other company methods.

Many companies manage to address half the deficiencies from each audit before the next. Each year, whittling away half the remaining issues results in getting closer and closer to the final goal. Usually, after several years of certification, companies realize there are safety issues they should address that are not covered in the audit. These companies then add the extra issues to their ongoing to-do safety issue list (otherwise known as a Corrective Action Log, or CAL).

Continual Improvement also applies to the COR system itself. Companies are actively invited to give feedback on the COR system, the audit, auditor performance, this manual and any other COR issue.