Understanding Canada’s Changing Safety Standards
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Fall protection safety standards specialist Andre Pelland of Pure Safety Group (PSG), makers of Guardian and Checkmate fall protection and Stronghold dropped object prevention products, educates on navigating the complex, changing CSA safety standards.
Basis of Regulations in Canada

Nowadays, it can get extremely frustrating for end users attempting to understand what product is compliant to the latest regulation and question as to whether they’re following the law or not. The answer to this puzzling question can be made very simple for the end user if they’re properly advised on where to find the information. Many misconceptions exist within the industry due to a lack of understanding of what is governed, published content and what is an industry expectation. As per governed, published content, it is required that fall protection is CSA “compliant” to CSA standards and the industry standard is CSA “certified.” The difference is between self-proclaimed compliance and third-party certification, which will be explained in further detail within this white paper.

The primary source of Health and Safety federal or provincial acts/legislations/ regulations/codes for any industry within Canada will depend on jurisdiction. The applicable regulatory content will be dependent on the province where the work is being carried out. However, if the work is being performed on federally managed property or if the project is funded by the federal government, in most cases it will fall under the federal Occupational and Health and Safety regulations. This information is important to establish as a user of the equipment must know what is considered compliant by the governing bodies. In addition to understanding the applicable legislation, it is also important to find a notification source that will keep you up to date with the latest revision of the regulation applicable to your jobsite or location. Of the many sources for subscriptions, automatic notifications and renewals of legal publications, the form of content is also an important aspect to take into consideration as the delivery of these materials may not be ideal for certain people’s lifestyles or habits. Examples would include sources such as ministry websites, Thomson Reuters, OSG, LexisNexis, CFIB, among others. While electronic delivery may be the more common option for some, physical copies may be more convenient for others. The mode of delivery of the information is extremely important as it could be the difference between being up-to-date or outdated; therefore, a self-evaluation is necessary to identify your daily patterns to assure your exposure to the latest updates.
The fall protection regulations in Canada are mainly based on the voluntary standards written by the CSA group writing committee, and regulatory bodies rely on these standards to keep safety equipment to a high standard that's been developed by industry professionals. In addition to the regulation, the industry has now set an expectation for product to be CSA-“certified,” which is not required by law, however has been set as an expectation by most of the country. CSA-certified products are specifically tested and certified by a third-party entity named CSA International that monitors manufacturers of certified products to assure that incompatible components aren’t interchanged as an alternative and manufacturing practices remain consistent and in accordance with accepted engineered drawings.

The governing bodies and writing committees are not directly associated, which can inhibit the process of having the latest references in published documents. This is also caused by these entities not always using outside sources to help integrate new material. Like any other secondhand information, the messaging is susceptible to misinterpretation. The market has had to endure many long pauses in the applicability of new standards such as those for self-retracting devices, personal energy absorbers and lanyards. From the original release date to the actual release date, there's been over 18 months of lag time before standards were actually implemented. To give perspective, the revision year for two standards from 2017 have now been implemented as the observed versions as of February 2020.

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TRANSITION STAGES

With great quality standards with impenetrable parameters comes long transition stages when new revisions are implemented, because manufacturers need to update their products, certify products through third-party testing (CSA International), exhaust existing stock and commence production of the newly certified products. These transitions could take months and perhaps even years, depending on the extent of the product changes, which can add further confusion. Without direct channels of communication, information can be misunderstood and poorly delivered, it inhibits transitions from always being smooth.

End users may also experience supply disruption as certain manufacturers take more time developing their new product line to make sure they have a complete and flawless offering. The available and advertised product will also vary from one manufacturer to another, as some are more prepared, due to concentrating efforts towards certifying one product category versus another. In addition, the size of the manufacturer and the amount of resources available to them play a role in the development of a new offering.

Transitions may also affect the offerings of specific manufacturers or all manufacturers, depending on the new parameters of the standard. As an example, most of the self-retracting devices in the market recently needed an overhaul as there were so many significant changes to the most recent standard, such as a test weight increase (from 220 lb. to 310 lb. or more), a new leading class, demanding resistance to a razor-sharp steel edge, and accommodating a 94-inch free fall. Because the standard hadn’t been revised for 17 years, these changes were significant and had to be applied to all products within a broad offering.

Standard revisions may also pose unforeseen risk of confusion as certain standards aren’t changed in a gradual manner and can experience a complete rewrite, presenting potential confusion as content may be unfamiliar to certain manufacturers who aren’t up to date. This highlights the importance for manufacturers to get involved with the CSA writing committee in order to stay up to date with any major additions or changes to standards. This also allows the opportunity to share intel and findings, which are crucial in standard development. One of the key factors driving standards progression is the collaboration between manufacturers sitting on standard committees who can remaining impartial to the protect brands affected by the standards. The state of mind required when developing these types of standards must always be in favor of the individual user and must not have any outside financial bias toward certain manufacturers and their products. This is a responsibility every safety professional should take to heart as the safety of the user is paramount.

The industry, in almost all cases, will change for the greater good and, although it may take a longer-than-anticipated period of time before the latest information reaches the end user, it’s safe to say there’s a wealth of knowledge behind the standards that is rooted in good intention and positive outcomes that enhance worker safety.