

Scott Fowler

Hello everyone, welcome to the Case for Safety podcast. I'm your host, Scott Fowler. I appreciate you being with us today for a conversation about government affairs and the safety profession. We're going to be helping you get up to speed on the latest regulatory developments in occupational safety and health and a whole lot more. And here to share his thoughts on that, I'm very happy to welcome Dr. Bob Drane, Chair of ASSP's Government Affairs Committee. Bob, welcome. Great to have you back on the show.

Bob Drane

Thank you, Scott, I really appreciate being able to join.

Scott Fowler

Excited for the conversation. This is something that always generates a lot of interest among our members to know how ASSP is advocating for the profession on Capitol Hill and in other places. To kick us off, I thought we could just kind of give our audience a better idea of what the Government Affairs Committee is, what it does, and your role as the chair, if you'd like to kick us off.

Bob Drane

Sure, I'd be happy to do that. So, the Government Affairs Committee, you know, of course, is made up of members of the committee, the society. And they're all volunteers from various industries and professional backgrounds. And they serve as a, we serve as an advisory group, right?

So, we help identify emerging issues that may arise surrounding governmental affairs that affect EHS and also the society in general and our advocacy priorities. So, some things that we do that I do, of course, I'm the chair of the committee. I lead the committee in conjunction with another colleague from ASSP, Greg Mannix, who's the manager of advocacy. And he is just an awesome asset to me. So, I want to give kudos to him here.

So, what we do, the committee, provide valuable practitioner perspectives across all the industries and we help to ensure ASSP advocacy priorities reflect the real-world challenges that we face every day out there. We also identify emerging issues. So, a lot of the members will interact with us and identify emerging issues that we need to prioritize so that we have a broader national understanding and be able to engage with our national consensus standards.

We have discussions that help ensure ASSP's advocacy priorities remain connected to the real workplace, right? To the challenges in the real workplace. We also help identify opportunities to educate members about important policies and regulatory developments. And also, finally, through expertise of our volunteer members, the committee helps to connect to the frontline workplace with federal policies and discussions. So, to take away on this is government affairs is driven by experiences and the expertise of our ASSP members.

You touched on a lot of it there, having this kind of advocacy role is so critical to safety professionals because the world of EHS is always changing. To your point, it's so important to have that voice of the safety professional represented and seeing the kind of changes that are going to help make safer workplaces.

Bob Drane

Yes, that's correct.

Scott Fowler

When you take a look at the current landscape, of course, there's always a lot of things going on in the world of EHS as we just talked about. What are some of the biggest regulatory and policy developments you're seeing that safety professionals should know about right now?

Bob Drane

Well, some of the major ones right now that we have been working on and are following. course, you know, regulatory policy and activity. There's a number of standards that are being reviewed. Actually, 20 of them that will be reviewed in August of this year.

Some examples would be the new regulation changes. not really regulations yet, but there are changes when it comes to fall protection with fixed ladders in industrial and commercial buildings. As you know, or may not know, in those cases, or in that case, the rule was that there was going to be a change that had to be made by the year 2036.

This was given in the year 2016 with the initial deadline of 2017. But recently in June, I believe, OSHA made some changes and announced some changes and they have largely backed off from that standard for the moment at least.

So you know, one of our key aspects is to try to really take a close look at that and what we can do to leverage our impact and our influence, if you will. But some things to know are they, like I said, proposed removing the 2036 deadline requiring existing fixed ladders over

24 ft to be retrofitted with personal fall arrest systems. I don't know about you, but personal fall arrest systems on 24 foot ladders, to me, just makes common sense, right? Because those cages, those devices that they have currently around such ladders, if anything, all that's gonna do is injure you on the way down. That's my opinion. But OSHA has not made a final decision on this.

And of course, we, ASSP, at a high level, we're focused on trying to make sure that they understand we're focused on trying to influence them to understand that our Z359 fall protection standard would be the best modern safety system available for personal fall arrest systems and that ladder cages and wells, like I said, are inherently dangerous and that it was the right way to go to make those changes in the future.

Another example of some of the things that we are looking at in greater detail. At the start of 2026, we started focusing in on the Department of Energy and some proposed updates they were going to have to worker safety and health. And we've looked into that and we've submitted in February that we support the DOE, the Department of Energy's effort to modernize that rule when recommending several of their refinements.

We encourage them to continue to recognize voluntary consensus standards like the ones that we offer through ANSI across their organization, across their influence, if you will. Overall, our comments reflected ASSP's roles and responsibilities and providing technical expertise to help agencies develop science-based, workable requirements that improve worker safety.

So those are two examples. Another one, and I'll leave this one as the final, OSHA recently updated the HASCOM, Hazard Communication Enforcement Directive. And in that directive, some key changes for employers and safety professionals were a revised standard which looks at hazard classification criteria a little bit differently. It looks at labeling requirements more intensely.

Safety data sheet recommendations and requirements, classifications of aerosols and other chemical hazards, and requirements for chemicals under pressure, including trade secrets and hazard communication elements. So that's three different, really four, because I said there's the 20 standards that they're looking at changing in August and that we are currently working on.

Scott Fowler

Let's talk about the advocacy a little bit more. You mentioned there, know, encouraging the use of Z359 standards, know, advocating for, you know, certain regulations, things like that. How does, I wonder if you talk a little bit more about, you know, how ASSP engages on

behalf of the profession, you know, as all these issues continue to evolve, you know, to make that voice of the safety professional, you know, clear to those making the decisions.

Bob Drane

Well, first of all, it's our job as the Government Affairs Committee to make sure that safety professionals stay involved in it, that we as the experts stay involved. Also to help members understand what the developments mean in the practice and in newsletters and webinars and other things that we do, podcasts like this. The focus, you know, has to always be upon practical implementation, right? And improving worker safety. That's the priority.

While regulatory priorities change over time, the ASSP's focus must remain constant, helping organizations reduce risk and strengthening our safety systems. So, we're really about that. So many of today's conversations, whether they're about regulations or standards or guidance, ultimately come back to preventing serious injuries and fatalities.

So, a takeaway from this part of our podcast here, regulations and policies will continue to evolve. They're always going to do that. And we, ASSP and the Government Affairs Committee are committed to helping members navigate those changes.

Scott Fowler

Well said. And thinking about that, you know, there could be, you know, any number of, you know, different regulatory developments around different safety and health topics. So, I wonder kind of what guides the Government Affairs Committee into, you know, deciding which issues they're gonna engage on.

Is there, I mean, there's so many workplace safety and health issues that ASP could have a voice, how do you, what's the decision-making process like, okay, we need to speak up about this particular topic?

Bob Drane

Yeah, well, like you said, helping ensure the perspective of safety professionals is paramount, as I've mentioned. But the ASSP does this through technical comments and collaboration with federal agencies. And also, we participate in coalitions, partnerships, and congressional engagement. I know for a fact myself; I spoke last year in the summer on the heat illness prevention program that the federal government that OSHA was looking at making changes with.

So, I spoke and several other of my ASSP standard committee representatives spoke to OSHA and two members of Congress about that. So congressional engagement is very critical and very important to our organization and what we do, our committee. And of

course, through member education, those are some ways that we help to make sure that we engage.

So, one recent example of ASSP's formal comments was, like I said, rather than simply supporting or opposing the proposal we focused in on bringing its technical expertise our technical expertise and consensus standards experience to the conversation and that was powerful it helped helping by doing that we're helping to ensure that the recommendations we make are practical, evidence-based, and centered on protecting workers.

I think this reflects the ASSP's broader approach to advocacy. It brings technical expertise and practitioner experience into the regulatory process. If you want an example of that, again, I'll speak to it from the Department of Energy example.

The comments that we made to them emphasize the continued importance of structured safety management systems, like our ANSI Z10, for example, or ISO 45001, forgive me. And it illustrates our advocacy that extends beyond OSHA whenever federal actions affect occupational EHS. And I think this reflects ASSP's role of providing technical expertise that helps policy makers make informed decisions.

Scott Fowler

One other example I thought as we were talking that people should definitely know about showing the impact of the Government Affairs Committee and ASSP was during last year during the cuts to OSHA and NIOSH and the advocacy that you undertook to say, you know, these are critical agencies that need our support and that, you know, we made a real impact there. some of those cuts were reversed and, you know, brought funding back to NIOSH for the critical work that they do.

Bob Drane

Yeah. And that was just absolutely so important. You know, another example, congressional engagement example would be that in May, the ASSP submitted a statement of record to the House Workforce Protection Subcommittee for a hearing on emerging workplace safety issues, and the statement highlighted several priorities, which included, and I think this is important to understand, serious injury and fatality prevention, so SIF prevention, the importance of implementing voluntary consensus standards. I mean, that's really what we're about, Scott.

We're about making sure that our voluntary consensus standards stay before the federal government, before OSHA, the EPA, and other entities where we can help them look at things from our area of expertise, our knowledge. So, evidence-based approaches to injury

prevention were paramount. The evolving role of safety professionals in addressing emerging workplace risk was the key, right?

That was an opportunity for us to ensure the voice of our practicing safety professionals was represented during congressional discussions, during the Department of Energy discussions, during the discussions around heat illness prevention. There are just many. If I could say anything else about it, one thing I would leave as kind of a takeaway to this question is realize that ASSP helps to ensure the expertise of safety professionals contributes to the important conversations that affect our profession. That's what we're about.

Scott Fowler

Very well said. And you mentioned emerging issues there. I know we talked about some things that are out there now, advocacy efforts, ASSP is involved, but I wonder, what are some emerging issues or things you see down the road that you're paying attention to that you feel like safety professionals need to keep an eye on in the coming years?

Bob Drane

Well, besides the ones that I told you about, one of the leading emergence emerging issues right now is most definitely AI, artificial intelligence, right? That is on everybody's mind right now. It's it is a just maybe one of the most paramount issues not only within our government affairs committee for the ASSP, but in the profession overall, right?

And I see it from a twofold perspective because I think you know, Scott, that I'm also a university professor. And so, I see it in my students, and I see the way that they can use AI to their advantage. And I also see and have to deal with the way that they use AI in a different way. That's not acceptable. Right? So, I think right now, AI integration into our profession and all the things that surround that is probably the hottest topic there is.

Along with that, I would say these 20 points that we will cover various different topics in August with OSHA are paramount as well. There are different changes that they're proposing. And lastly to that, I could speak from the point of view of being an electrical safety specialist for decades.

And I can tell you that I know one of the emerging issues that I see that it's really on the horizon is OSHA coming in line, updating their OSHA electrical standards, electrical safety standards, and really starting to move into more maturity with electrical safety, because that's gonna be paramount.

Scott Fowler

Is there anything else you're saying with OSHA in particular? know there's always lot of interest in regulatory updates with OSHA. mean, in addition to the things we've talked about, are you seeing any movement in any other OSHA regulations that safety professionals out there should be aware of?

Bob Drane

Those are the main ones right now, the main ones that we're focusing on. But of course, you always hear that they're looking at this, looking at that. I would say right now, those are the main ones.

And I don't have it in front of me, the 20 different standards that you're going to be looking at the technical meeting in August. But I will tell you from looking at perusing it, I saw in there many of the chemicals were included, like looking at cadmium and some of the other chemical hazards. And looking at those standards, the silica standard, all of them really very closely. They were definitely among those 20.

Scott Fowler

Going back to the Government Affairs Committee, if folks out there, you know, watching, listening, or, you know, interested in getting involved or, you know, learning more about the Government Affairs Committee, what, where can they go? Where, where should we, where can we direct them? How can they learn more?

Bob Drane

Probably the best place for them to go is, is first of all, to make sure that they're a member of the ASSP. And that's the first thing. And then definitely, go to our website, go to our ASSP website. And there we have a very friendly search window. They can easily just type in government affairs, and it will open up a whole plethora of information about our government affairs.

We also send out newsletters. We do podcasts like this, we do other critical updates and send out information, we even get involved in training. So, it's one of our long standing priorities to help any organization move beyond compliance through our voluntary consensus standards. So that's really important, right? And so, we want to be there, and our website provides that platform. So, I would say that that's the best place to start, go to our website and do the surfing.

Look around, see what we have to say about government affairs, sign up for our continuous newsletter, and just look for what's on the horizon in the future.

Scott Fowler

Well, thank you so much again, Bob, for coming on. I really appreciate you taking the time and the work that you and the Government Affairs Committee do to, as we've talked about, be the safety professional's voice. It's so critical that the safety profession has a voice in these conversations and really appreciate you helping be that voice.

Bob Drane

Thank you, Scott. Appreciate you inviting me.

Scott Fowler

Thank you for tuning in. Be sure to like and subscribe, and we'll see you back here in two weeks.