Ethic

The Absurd Yet Preferred Approach to Safety Management

By Jan K. Wachter

IN BRIEF
• Traditional safety management approaches have not been entirely supportive of core ethical values.
• This article explores the legacy of these approaches and the effect of business factors that make adopting an ethics-based approach seemingly absurd, although it may be the preferred approach to safety management. Its absence has resulted in ethical burdens being placed on safety professionals.
• The article concludes with paths forward for embracing ethics as the new basis for safety management.

Ponder this scenario. The first day that a new general manager (GM) arrives on site to begin work, he calls the safety manager into his office. The safety manager is initially honored that the new GM would elect to see him on his first day.

This feeling turns into dismay and despair as the new GM lectures the safety manager that all safety laws and regulations are not "black and white" but rather "varying shades of gray." He explains in no uncertain terms that every decision related to the company's safety function, including regulatory compliance and watching out for the company's employees, is a cost-benefit analysis.

The GM further enlightens the safety manager, "Before you tell me I have to do something, you provide me with the probability and financial implications of getting caught not implementing these safety requirements or in not providing a safe workplace for employees. Everything is a business decision here. What do you have to say about that?"

The safety manager's mind is racing as he tries to figure out how to respond. The safety manager quickly decides this must be a test as to whether he has ethical values and is willing to protect the organization and the GM, as well as uphold the ideals of his profession.

He responds that based on his experience and education he believes that most safety requirements are essentially "black and white," but in cases which seem to have gray areas he would be glad to discuss with the GM the various analysis options that can be used to select the next course of action. The safety manager further states that if the new GM continues with this overt policy of knowingly promoting the violation of regulatory requirements and a less-than-safe workplace, he would be ethically forced to report the new GM to the attorney general's office.

The new GM's face turns red and he starts pounding his fist vigorously on his desk. He sneers at the safety manager, "You are both absurd and naive." The safety manager realizes that he has miscalculated the GM's intent. The dejected safety manager wonders whether his résumé is updated because he is certain that he will be fired or relegated to some other distasteful function.

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This scenario is not hypothetical; it occurred. Many SH&E professionals can relate to the underlying tension that this scenario portrays: the SH&E professional wanting to do the right thing versus management making decisions based on cost-benefit, risk, business or factors that may be contrary to "doing the right thing."

A scenario such as this can act as a springboard for safety professionals to promote more rigorously the ethical basis for safety management, or it can cause safety professionals to become disillusioned about their chosen profession, especially when realizing that the most common approaches to safety management may not be totally in line with ethical perspectives anyway.

The Ethical Approach to Safety Management

Morality refers to values that are subscribed to and fostered by society. The origin of these values may be cultural, personal (e.g., family, experiences, self-reflection), educational or religious, and could even be genetically imprinted through evolutionary biology processes. Most likely, these values are formed from a combination of these and other sources (Hecter, Nadel & Michod, 1993; Wachter, 2009). Based on these core values, morality is essentially knowing broadly what is right or more specifically knowing what is the right thing to do.

Ethics is more concrete than abstract morality. Ethics is "internal" morality applied to "external" everyday life, directing these inward basic moral values of proper conduct outward toward other people and/or the environment (Barbi & Orr, 2007).

Thus, ethics is about morality applied to situations and decision making, including those involving workplace safety considerations. Ethics is about taking a particular course of action, exhibiting a set of specific behaviors, embracing a group of standards and/or defining a set of expectations, based on moral values. In short, it is about reducing morality to practice—where the rubber of reality hits the moral high road—through personal decisions, then taking responsibility for these decisions (Wachter & Bird, 2010a).

Many people think that these ethical values are normative. Since ethical norms appear common-

place, one might be tempted to attribute them to common sense. But disagreements do exist. People recognize some common ethical norms, but individuals interpret, apply and balance these norms in different ways in light of their own values and life experiences (Resnik, 2007).

Thus, ethics tends to be more situational and contextual than morality and, ultimately, relational in its identity—involving the individual (e.g., safety professional) in relation with others (e.g., the workforce, the public, management) (Wachter, 2009).

In ethics, there are "doers" and "receivers." Therefore, a substantial part of ethics is trying to understand how the actions of doers affect receivers (Barbi & Orr, 2007). By its nature, ethics forces safety professionals to have "the other" orientation, which is synergistic with the fundamental orientation of the profession itself (e.g., helping workers).

Ethics obliges safety professionals to see how just, fair and honest their decisions, actions, interpretations and representations are, despite an organization's safety culture or the prevailing safety management philosophy in place at that time (Wachter & Bird, 2010a).

For a safety professional, ethics also involves having courage of one's conviction. It is not only about vaguely doing the right thing, but more specifically in determining norms of specific professional conduct that distinguish or differentiate between acceptable and unacceptable behavior and choosing between right and wrong (Resnik, 2007) on a morally defendable basis, even in a competitive and challenging business environment.

Core Ethical Values

Several core values shape ethical behavior and influence decision making for safety professionals. Many ethical values promote the aims of a safety professional's conduct of work, such as knowledge, truth and avoidance of error (Resnik, 2007). Even the desire to do good work (no matter one's profession) is in itself a human value.

Other ethical values are essential to collaborative work, a hallmark of the safety profession. These values include trust, accountability, mutual respect and fairness (Resnik, 2007). Other values viewed as important for safety professionals include impartiality, candor, fidelity to trust, dignity, compassion and courage (Schneid, 2008). But perhaps the most essential value to have is reciprocity (also known as the Golden Rule): treating others as you would like to be treated (Wachter & Bird, 2010a).

The Golden Rule has various formulations: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"; "Do not unto others as you would not have them do unto you"; and "Love your neighbor as yourself." This is a common principle of most religions:

Buddhism, Baha'i faith, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism, Taoism and Zoroastrianism (Eckhardt, 2001). Arguably this value, the need of care for others, is the most essential basis for the modern concept of human rights and ethics.

The application of a care-based ethics approach grounded in the notion of reciprocity has important implications for safety professionals who are obliged to embrace the following principles in the workplace (Kapp & Parboteeah, 2008):

1) Since workers have a right to just and equitable treatment, safety professionals have a responsibility to ensure that the right to employment does not endanger workers' physical welfare or jeopardize their moral integrity for all employees.

2) Since there is inherent dignity associated with labor, workers are humans deserving dignity and are not merely means of production; thus, employers and employees should treat all people with consideration.

3) Since there is a moral imperative for safety professionals to care for others, safety professionals are required to remove hardship, regardless of the cost. This perceived moral obligation to provide a safe workplace is ancient (Eckhardt, 2001) and can be found in the Code of Hammurabi, the writings of Aristotle and the Old Testament.

Safety professionals can view and apply the Golden Rule in the workplace in one of two ways:

1) as requiring them to perform specific actions that they want others to do to them (a fairly self-serving perspective);

2) as guiding the safety professionals' behavior in the same general ways that they want others to act to others. In this latter instance, safety professionals can act as ethical role models and even as ethical cheerleaders for organizations or clients they serve (Wachter & Bird, 2010a).

Organizations should adopt an ethics-based approach for reasons beyond a moral imperative. As an outgrowth of adopting an ethical basis for safety management, people (both internal and external stakeholders) feel good about an organization that understands and does the right thing from a safety perspective (Wachter, 2009).

Most everyone can agree that good feelings which are germinated from doing good things are great outcomes to aspire to and achieve. As a consequence of adopting an ethics-based approach, safety truly becomes a corporate value and cannot be constrained by or reduced to factors such as compliance, cost-benefit determinations, risk analyses, metrics, human error or human behavior.

In addition, organizations that use an ethics-based approach to safety management exhibit certain admirable characteristics (Tidwell, 2000). For example, safety is valued and openly discussed; a set of obligations is shared by employer and employees, including duty of care owed to the employee, duty of mutual loyalty and respect, right of the employee to be informed of risk and right of the employee to refuse work where risk is unacceptable; and a formal code of ethical conduct is established by management, where everyone is held accountable for behavior against those ethical standards.

The Problem With the Ethical Approach

One major problem with the ethical approach to safety management is determining how far the safety professional will go to reduce risk (Eckhardt, 2001). At what point (if there is a point) does the moral obligation to care for workers stop?

In addition, the ethical approach ultimately may be insincere, since there could be profit motives lurking behind the scenes. Because stakeholders and the public value ethical behavior, organizations may elect to do the ethical thing to influence stakeholders and the public to buy their goods and services and increase market share. Thus, ethical "means" are used to justify disingenuous "ends."

Another problem is the undeniable and seemingly irresolvable tension/conflict between capitalism and ethics-based safety management approaches (Childs, 2000; Wachter, 2009).

However, if ethics and resulting proactive safety programs (going beyond regulations and costs/risks-benefit analyses) positively affect the quality of life for workers and the public (which is a desired end) and if this quality of life can be viewed as a valued commodity, the economic engine will run using an ethics-based approach as its fuel because stakeholders desire and will eventually pay for this commodity. In turn, this can generate capital to support additional activities that will enhance life's quality.

But perhaps the greatest economic reason to support an ethics-based approach to safety management within a capitalistic system is that prosperity generates an environment where continual improvement and reduced risk are affordable, whereas economic desperation often creates environments for increased risk and unsafe working conditions.

The greatest problem with adopting this approach may be that it is too foreign to current collective consciousness and experiences. Ethics is a decidedly different approach when compared to more traditional safety management approaches. Furthermore, upon investigation, these traditional approaches could be viewed as not being entirely supportive of an ethical basis for managing safety functions. Thus, the ethical approach may appear absurd to most corporate managers and even safety professionals due to the fact that it is so contrary to other more common (and perhaps inherently less than ethical) safety management approaches.

The Regulatory/Legal Approach

Organizations manage safety functions using many approaches. Historically, these approaches have been geared toward achieving specific outputs. After passage of the OSH Act in 1970, the prominent approach to safety management involved attaining regulatory compliance. This approach prevails today, especially among smaller companies whose size and resulting monetary constraints dictate it.

However, many hazards and risks are not covered or controlled adequately through existing regulations (Wachter, 2009). Thus, regulations may not be optimal to control risk or to provide due care for employees. In addition, adopting a strict regulatory approach to safety management can lead organizations to operate near the boundaries of the regulatory playing field, which may result in noncompliance.

In addition, safety managers may have to elect to perform regulatory compliance activities at the expense of dealing with more pressing workplace safety issues (Wachter & Bird, 2010b). On a more personal level, safety professionals, often acting as regulatory compliance officers, may be paid in part (knowingly or unknowingly) to serve as "designated felons" for an organization (Hansen, 2000). This is a potential unethical aspect of implementing a regulatory approach.

On basic principles, the regulatory approach also may not be an ethical approach since legality and ethics are not the same thing. Just because options or behaviors are legal (within the scope of the law, regulation or standard) does not necessarily mean they are ethical (Barbi & Orr, 2007). People caught in questionable practices or unethical behaviors often use the "I didn't do anything illegal" defense (Wachter, 2009). Also, something that is illegal may be ethical, such as civil disobedience (1960s race riots in America) to establish a civil liberty (Resnik, 2007). Many social reformers have urged citizens to disobey laws to protest what they regarded as immoral or unjust laws.

In most cases, however, if something is illegal it is probably unethical. Thus, illegality determines in part what constitutes unethical behavior, but legality does not necessarily determine what constitutes ethical behavior. Therefore, identifying what is legal or illegal is not necessarily sufficient for determining what is ethical (Wachter & Bird, 2010a).

Laws and regulations function largely as societal constraints informing individuals what they cannot do. Laws and regulations tend to be reactive, protecting individuals from someone, something or personal loss. Ethics really should instruct individuals and organizations as to what they should do. Ethics should be about doing the right thing, not about not doing the wrong thing (Wachter, 2009).

In addition, fundamental differences exist between the law and ethics. The law embraces enforceable rules, measuring success through compliance since people must adhere to its mandates. Ethics on the other hand deals with values, and is self-regulated, largely voluntary and typically unenforceable. Thus, ethical norms tend to be broader and more informal than laws (Resnik, 2007).

The current trend is to go beyond regulatory compliance. Tort cases and various court decisions reflect continued moral duties to provide safety to others above and beyond regulations (Eckhardt, 2001). An overriding morality exists among people worldwide to provide safe environments for employees and the public beyond regulations. Numerous safety organizations, boards, councils and

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associations have formed over the past century, all without regulatory drivers (Wachter, 2009).

The Loss Prevention/Control Approach

Due largely to its ability to resonant with the motivations, language and mind-set of business managers, the prominent safety management approach in the 1980s and 1990s became loss prevention/control, where a company tries to maximize profits by reducing costs associated with accidents and incidents (Wachter, 2009).

In this approach, cost (or conversely monetary savings or profit) is the managed output. Key safety decisions rest on results of cost-benefit analyses wherein the organization balances the cost of implementing safety programs and activities versus the cost avoidance (benefit) associated with reducing injuries, environmental releases and property damage (Wachter & Bird, 2010b).

Historically, the author believes that this approach has been applied successfully due to its alignment with common business practices and philosophy. But this approach also can be realistically viewed as not being based on ethics. Everything has a price, even human life. Placing values (and especially variable values) on human life and for the loss of partial or total functioning of various body parts appears too calculating and uncaring.

Furthermore, there is always some tipping point at which worker pain and suffering becomes acceptable since the perceived business costs for implementing safety interventions are more than the benefits to be accrued (Wachter, 2009).

In this approach, profits, not employees, are the

most important asset, and it is acceptable not only to tolerate but also to endorse workers' pain, suffering and nonoptimal work conditions if it is justifiable based on cost-benefit calculations.

Fundamentally, this approach is negative and reactive in its basic construct, since it starts with analyzing possible accident scenarios. Courses of safety actions are then defended based on avoiding the probabilistic future costs associated with these incidents.

However, it can be difficult to generate accurate numbers for determining the actual costs of accidents and predicting the real benefits of intervention (Wachter & Bird, 2010b). In particular, indirect failure costs are too difficult or time-consuming to calculate, which makes this approach potentially imprecise. Basing decisions regarding worker safety and health on imprecise data can appear to be almost arbitrary and capricious at times.

Also, this approach tends not to be proactive (e.g., looking out for the best interests and enhanced care of employees) since continual improvements for safety would occur only up to a certain point if organizations strictly adhere to loss prevention approaches.

In the final analysis, it is hard to justify "doing the right thing" (including even achieving regulatory compliance in many cases), since doing the right thing may not be the most cost-beneficial decision to make.

The Risk-Based Approach

In more recent years (1990s to 2000s), many organizations embraced risk management approaches to manage safety risks as outputs. The goal is to lower risk to levels deemed acceptable to management. This risk can have many different components, including previously discussed factors such as risk of regulatory noncompliance and financial risk due to the costs of incidents.

This approach appears more expansive and less prescriptive than previous approaches, since risk can broadly include soft factors such as public and stakeholder perception and even ethical reputation (Wachter & Bird, 2010b). However, in most cases, this approach is largely a variation of the loss control approach, where risk becomes a surrogate measure for costs.

Organizations have attempted to develop and apply rigorous quantitative risk models to determine those activities for which hazards will be prevented and controlled. Often, however, these organizations only generate qualitative risk assessments (even though "numbers" are often provided as outputs for risk comparison purposes among activities).

As a result, these risk-based outputs are often subjective. In the final analysis, this method is based on managers determining the levels of acceptable risk. This is a major ethical dilemma. What managers believe is acceptable risk may be different than what ethical safety professionals view as acceptable risk.

Manuele (2008) writes that acceptable risk levels should be as low as reasonably practicable (ALARP) and defines ALARP based on MIL-STD-882E as "that level of risk which can be further lowered only by an increment in resource expenditure that cannot be justified by the resulting decrement of risk."

Using this definition, the concept of acceptable risk is routed through a loss control lens focusing on a rather negative view of the ALARP point. However, factors beyond cost considerations and resource expenditures can determine the acceptability of safety risk. Tolerability of risk can have many other components, including ethics. "Doing the right thing" should be considered when reducing risk, even though it may not be the most cost-conscious path to travel.

The most basic risk equation contains two multiplicative components: probability and severity. Managers are often willing to accept bad things if they occur infrequently enough.

However, the core reality of the safety profession involves managing and controlling these infrequent (and often potentially serious) events, since these occurrences still have certain probabilities of occurring.

Efforts to convince management that it is the ethical responsibility of safety managers and the organization to better manage these improbable events when perceived risks or costs do not support these investigations or in the absence of strong regulatory drivers are often viewed by management as absurd propositions.

The Behavior-Based Approach

Spanning the 1930s to present day, the behavior-based safety approach is an old (the Heinrich model) and modern approach. It has been repeatedly stated that most workplace accidents are caused by worker behavior (e.g., unsafe acts) (Heinrich, Petersen & Roos, 1980); such a belief supports using this approach. In most implementations, workers identify safe behaviors to observe and measure their coworkers' acts.

Positive reinforcement of observed safe behaviors by peers is the basic catalyst for change. The outcome is safe worker behavior. This bottom-up approach is potentially culture changing (Wachter, 2009). Workers tend to do the ethical thing in looking out for each other.

But several problems must be recognized. First, this approach can be difficult to implement in union environments. Also, even though not its intent, this approach can support unethical tendencies to blame workers for incidents and unsafe acts. In addition, it is difficult to diagnose and correct safety management system deficiencies based solely on behavioral observation data (Wachter, 2009).

Thus, the behavior-based safety approach does not have a strong history of driving safety program/system improvements (although the best behavior-based systems achieve this). In the overall analysis, this approach could conflict with safety managers' moral duties that are often oriented toward developing ethically consistent safety processes and systems that become institutionalized, rather than leaving it

up to individual workers to choose and implement their own variable ideals of ethical behaviors.

In recent years, the behavior-based approach has transitioned into human error prevention (or more positively termed, *human performance improvement*). This approach anticipates and minimizes human error during work performance by changing or improving workplace mechanisms such as processes, procedures, human resource practices, supervisory skills, training, workplace design and work environment. Human error is viewed largely as a result of, rather than the cause of, incidents, thus alleviating some ethical concerns associated with more traditional behavior-based approaches.

The Safety Management System/Quality Approach

With the manufacturing sector's quality revolution that occurred in the late 21st century catalyzed largely by the Japanese auto industry's success using quality management principles, safety management approaches are evolving away from attaining a specific output (e.g., low total recordable case rates) to concentrating more on understanding, controlling and improving processes used to accomplish work in a safe manner. The intent is to improve management systems/processes, based on maximizing effectiveness, efficiency and process control. The goal is to make quality, productivity and safety considerations equal players and interdependent partners (Wachter & Bird, 2010b).

This concept has progressed into using formalized safety management systems (e.g., such as those based on OHSAS 18001 and ANSI/AIHA Z10) to manage organizational safety risk. This is basically an extension of Petersen's pioneering work that moved accident causation theory away from individual acts and localized conditions to the organizational management system itself.

He concludes that unsafe acts, unsafe conditions and accidents are all symptoms of problems in the organizational management system. Furthermore, senior management is responsible for building a system that can effectively analyze and control the hazards associated with an organization's operations (Kuusisto, 2000, citing Petersen, 1988).

In this approach, safety is no longer considered a sunk cost; instead, it becomes an integral function of doing business, just like quality. The safety function is not in a hidden organizational box, rather it spans across the organization and is viewed strategically, especially in upfront planning stages. This approach does not blame employees or even managers for management system deficiencies. It blames the system, which can be under the control of management, employees or even outside stakeholders.

However, it presents a potential ethical downside. This approach is strongly entrenched in conducting and interpreting measurements and metrics to improve processes (the check part of the plan-do-check-act cycle). This introduces the risk of creative management of safety performance indicators, especially if rewards, bonuses and promotions are strongly tied to them (Kausek, 2007; Schneid, 2008).

This ethical deficiency applies to managing of and reporting on lagging and leading indicators/results that assess safety performance, although this behavior has been more strongly linked with mismanaging lagging indicator information (e.g., organizations not reporting incidents or imaginatively categorizing incidents to maintain clean safety records to achieve a reward).

In organizations that adopt the quality-based approach, safety is theoretically elevated to the same level as quality and production. This should provide inherently more respect to the safety function and profession. But does this realistically happen in many organizations? From personal experience, when mandated organizational budget cuts occur, safety, quality and production functions are rarely treated equally.

Nevertheless, the safety management system approach may be the best approach to date in terms of achieving an ethical safety culture. Ethics can become theoretically embedded in system design and implementation primarily by formalizing and institutionalizing ethics through developing, implementing and enforcing directives (e.g., procedures and processes) (Wachter, 2009).

At the least, this approach provides a mechanism of hope for achieving an ethical basis for managing safety since continual improvement is its key attribute. Thus, this approach gives hope that safety professionals and the organization can and will do the right thing eventually.

The safety management system approach defines roles, responsibilities, authorities, accountabilities and processes, thereby promoting rigor within the organization. Since line management becomes responsible and accountable for safety performance, the burden is off safety professionals to actually do the right thing. The safety professional becomes more of a technical and ethical expert to management, providing advice as to what the right thing is.

Safety professionals will have to live with the knowledge that they have recommended the best ethical courses of action, even if organizations may not be willing to currently implement their ethical vision. In any event, although this approach is fundamentally entrenched in risk management principles and although managers will still be in control of determining acceptable levels of organizational risk, it delivers a strong impetus to continually improve safety performance.

Ethical Burden of Safety Professionals

A safety professional who chooses not to do the right thing is making a personal and wrong choice; however, not being able to do the right thing is typically an organizational choice. Often, organizational constraints exist that are beyond the safety professional's control and that prevent the professional from doing the right thing.

Safety professionals often face tension between being safe (without risk) and safety (operating at an acceptable level of risk). Normally, the decisions on how far to reduce risk are based on three fac-

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tors: what the law dictates, the need to achieve a balance between losses and safety costs (Eckhardt, 2001), and the willingness to take risks (culture), but not ethics. Again, the reality is that in most organizations, management determines a spoken, written or implied limit within which safety professionals must work. This reality rarely embraces safety professionals validating their decisions and courses of action based on simply doing the right thing (Wachter, 2009).

Thus, safety professionals' ethical burden is this: not being able to fully execute their perceived moral/ethical responsibilities to provide a safe workplace, care for employees, and remove hardships due to organizational constraints such as costs and culture (Wachter, 2009).

This situation could cause deep cognitive dissonance for ethical safety professionals, feeding their fears of becoming cost and organizational burdens while making them feel guilty about not being able to fully implement their ethical responsibilities (Wachter & Bird, 2010a). At the least, ethical safety professionals may be organizationally ignored or dismissed for being nonteam players, absurd, naive, elitist or out of touch. All of this can lead to disillusionment.

A Call for Ethical Activism & Education

As noted, aspects of the more traditional approaches to safety management could be viewed as being less than ethical. Substantiating safety programs on the more ethical basis of doing the right thing is a better and sustaining basis for managing safety programs in the long run.

However, this will be difficult and perhaps impossible to sell to corporate management, especially given the current trend in health management. The medical profession is feeling the same burden of not being able to do the right thing based in part on the increased roles that medical insurance companies and the government are playing in determining what the right thing to do is in terms of delivering care to patients.

The medical profession has a long history of applying an ethical approach, as exemplified by its Hippocratic Oath (first of all, do no harm), which makes current concern by certain medical professionals and their patients about the use of primarily cost-based approaches to managing the profession seemingly justifiable and understandable.

On the other hand, the approaches to managing safety appear transitory. The safety profession has progressed through various management approaches—regulatory, behavioral, loss control, risk, quality and safety management systems. This progression may be due to desires to improve the profession or it could be due to the desire to continually and better justify the profession itself since previous approaches were not successful (or failed to do so).

The incessant need to justify the safety profession in organizations leads to less than ethical approaches and behavior, whether it is safety professionals imaginatively interpreting the OSHA classification of accidents or aligning their profes-

sional goals with protecting and engaging management rather than protecting and engaging workers.

This "imperfect" justification based on traditional approaches leads the profession and its professionals to often be viewed as "sunk costs," "necessary evils," "designated felons," "second-class citizens" or "organizational burdens." This perspective undoubtedly has psychological impacts on practitioners attempting to do the right thing in the workplace. It ultimately could lead to apathy, discouragement and perhaps even unethical behavior itself.

Safety professionals need to promote a more ethical approach to managing their profession. This strategy requires moral courage, conviction and professional unity, including a bottom-up approach at their worksites and through professional organizations. If safety professionals are ethical professionals, they need to look out for workers and the public despite culture, pressure and misdirection from management and peers. If safety professionals are ethical professionals, they need to look out for each other.

Since 2008, to reinforce the importance of ethics, American Board of Industrial Hygiene (ABIH) has administered and enforced an ethics requirement for the industrial hygiene profession mandating that CIHs accrue at least 2 hours in ethics training during each 5-year review cycle (ABIH, 2009). This represents a glimmer of hope for adopting a similar ethical approach to safety management.

BCSP issued a code of ethics and professional conduct in 2002. The first standard states:

> Hold paramount the safety and health of people, the protection of the environment and protection of property in the performance of professional duties and exercise their obligation to advise employers, clients, employees, the public, and appropriate authorities of danger and unacceptable risks to people, the environment or property. (BCSP, 2002)

Tacit in this standard is that it is the safety professional's duty to determine what risks are unacceptable to people, environment or property, not some risk-based corporate management standard as to what is and is not acceptable.

If all safety professionals were required to be certified to exercise their duties, this code of ethics and professional conduct could be used as uniform leverage for organizations to adopt an ethical approach to safety management. Or if safety professionals were required to be licensed by a state or federal accreditation body (like health-related professions), then the ethical approach to safety management could be better institutionalized (Ferguson & Ramsay, 2010).

However, as the state of the profession currently stands, one of the best hopes for adopting an ethical basis for safety management is for safety professionals to have moral courage en masse in promoting this approach, even in the face of its perceived absurdity and possible ridicule and rejection by employers.

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There is always hope that the safety ethic becomes as culturally and socially pervasive as the current environmental ethic. Hope lies with current certification bodies more aggressively enforcing their codes of ethics and professional conduct. And hope also lies with academic institutions teaching emerging safety professionals that ethics can be a viable and even preferred approach to safety management in the future.

According to Schneid (2008), education is the key to ensuring ethical and professional conduct within the safety professional ranks. Through education, safety professionals can be made aware of the pitfalls and learn from the errors of others to continuously improve and aspire to greater heights. This educational process should begin in academic institutions, not in the field.

A current program outcome under the general criteria for ABET-accredited applied science baccalaureate and associate degree programs is "an understanding of professional and ethical responsibility" (ABET, 2009). In a review of ABET-accredited undergraduate safety programs, no courses being offered specifically and significantly cover the ethical aspects of the safety profession.

However, ethics is being covered in a limited manner in most of these programs within one of the following course types: introduction to safety; safety leadership and safety management/administration; business ethics; and safety law; as well as through general university requirements encompassing ethics, social responsibility and civil engagement.

Ethics also is covered in courses that include limited discussions of professional codes of conduct. However, "ethics" is mentioned on average only one time (or not at all) in catalogues describing courses offered by these ABET-accredited safety degree programs.

One undergraduate safety sciences program is contemplating offering a major elective course in safety ethics, but it is still in the planning stage. The best forum to discuss safety ethics may not necessarily be traditional lecture-based courses, but through special topics courses on ethics in which case studies (both fictional and nonfictional) are discussed and deliberated using teaching methods (such as the Socratic Method) that stimulate critical thinking and the illumination of ideas.

More than 100 years have passed since Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* was published. This novel highlights the plight of the working class during the early 20th century and shows the corruption and horrific safety conditions of the American meatpacking industry. It intensely depicts the hopelessness of the working class.

At the end of the novel, there is a resounding call for workers to unite and organize in order to make positive and permanent changes in the work environment and conditions in Chicago. A similar battle cry is relevant today to excite, unite and organize safety professionals to promote and embrace the preferred (yet currently absurd) basis of safety management ethics. **PS**

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