

George Pearson

Reflecting on Risk: Looking Back on a Career as a Safety Professional



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I am a career safety professional with a broad range of safety experience in diversified manufacturing, high-hazard chemicals and wireless telecommunications. My career covers 47 years working in a wide range of organizations and operations with serious safety and health exposures. By leveraging my diversified technical background and my knowledge of high-hazard industry processes, I have developed cost-effective system-based solutions to sustain organizational safety.

Safety Career

My interest in safety was first piqued while serving in the U.S. Navy as an aviation machinist mate (airplane mechanic). While on active duty, I became involved in several aircraft incident investigations that involved fatalities. Working with investigating teams, I became aware that mishaps like these could have been prevented, lives could have been saved and the horrendous costs of the loss avoided. It made sense to me that there are great career opportunities in industrial safety and risk management.

My goal once out of graduate school was to be the corporate safety director for a Fortune 500 manufacturing organization. That happened in the early 1980s when I joined Figgie International as the national safety director in its insurance division. This was a leadership role with responsibilities for the safety and loss control practices in 40 Figgie operating divisions and 80 manufacturing locations in the U.S., Canada and Mexico. I was also responsible for providing technical support to insurance underwriting for outside property and casualty business. As time

permitted I led outside consulting projects. This was a great job and it was time for payback.

ASSE

This is where ASSE entered the picture. As a top safety professional for a large diversified manufacturing organization, it was important that I became active in the local chapter. I worked through the chairs and ultimately became chapter president. I also took a part-time assignment at Virginia Commonwealth University, teaching safety management to undergraduate business school students.

Mentoring was a big part of my work life and my volunteer life at ASSE. I was successful because I made use of the talents others brought to the table by training, guiding and nurturing them. My success as a mentor was almost a surprise to me, but when I was preparing my ASSE Fellow petition, I found that many of the verification documents and personal endorsements I received incorporated comments not only about my working relationship from the colleague but also favorable comments for being a mentor. I set goals, stretch goals if you will, that required me to be a mentor and not just a supervisor.

I am proud to have been recognized as an ASSE Fellow. I worked hard over my career to make a difference and create a better and safer workplace. I facilitated significant improvements at numerous employers who benefited from improved employee safety. I contributed considerably to ASSE in several leadership positions across the 43 years I have been a member. I was happy with my accomplishments over time, but to receive ASSE's highest recognition is nothing short of amazing.

As a board member, I was responsible for the Council on Practices and Standards and took an active leadership role. During my tenure, there were 29 practice specialties, branches, common interest groups and standing committees, and the group was recognized for being ASSE's most engaged council.

The council was responsible for the publication of original technical articles and white papers. We also helped establish ASSE as a leader in developing voluntary consensus standards on topics such as prevention through design, and occupational safety and health management systems. Our common interest groups grew and became more active and well known.

The diversity and far-reaching range of risk management issues is what made my administrator role in the practice specialty interesting. I

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George Pearson, CSP, ARM, is a career safety professional with a broad range of safety experience in diversified manufacturing, high-hazard chemicals and wireless telecommunications. An emeritus professional member of ASSE's Delmarva Chapter, George was honored as Society Fellow in 2015. He has a master's in Safety Management from New York University and a bachelor's from Fordham University.

was interacting with members from insurance companies, insurance brokerages, and industrial and municipal organizations with internal risk managers. We focused on emerging issues such as nanotechnology, fleet safety, workers' compensation and cost containment.

The greatest benefits I have received from being a member and a volunteer leader are personal and professional growth and enrichment. I placed great value on my many friendships and a solid professional network. In return, I received tremendous cooperation and loyalty that paved the way to the administrator post. We got a lot done over my 4-year tenure.

Risk Management/Insurance Industry

Some advice I can offer to new OSH professionals is to never stop learning. Be a mentor and share your learning and success with those who follow you. Understand a risk-based approach to safety and its benefits, but do not lose focus on maintaining compliance. Learn risk communications; be aware of and polish your communication and negotiating skills. Also, read *Advanced Safety Management* by Fred Manuele.

Additionally, risk management/insurance OSH professionals should focus on these hot topics.

- Risk assessment made easy.
- Sustaining a plant's safety culture.
- Using advanced safety management systems to solve OSH problems.
- National consensus standards versus rules and regulations; resolve the conundrum between strategic versus tactical.
- Safety and health aspects of emerging technologies (e.g., nanotechnology).
- Safe car projects.
- Software hazard analysis on automated equipment especially in lockout/tagout situations.
- Safety in operating drone aircraft.
- Educating young drivers.
- Electrical safety and arc flash.

What has been most rewarding about my career in risk management/insurance is the ability to make a difference. Also, knowing I am having a positive impact on the organization in which I am working and establishing a professional network that almost always pays off with job contacts, information exchange and socialization; some of my best friends are ASSE members.



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