

# Occupational Safety and Health Webinar: Ethics & Professionalism for Safety Practitioners

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Organiser:



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## Occupational Safety and Health Career Starter Sponsorship Programme




Society of Registered Safety Officers  
註冊安全主任協會

**Objective**

*To professionally and financially support full-time OSH students joining the OSH profession after graduation*

**The Programme**

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- The applicants have access to mentors for career guidance and build network via the respective institution activities*

**How to apply**

*For details and application, please contact IOSH Hong Kong*

**[ioshhongkong@gmail.com](mailto:ioshhongkong@gmail.com)**

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## Talking points

- Why do I care about this subject?

“Yesterday I thought I was smart;  
so I wanted to change how other people think of me.  
Today I am old and I know I am not smart;  
so I am changing myself

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## Talking points

- Why do **WE** care about this subject?
- What is Ethics and Professionalism (E&P)?
- What are the difficulties in putting E&P into practice?
- What is code of E&P or code of conducts, why are they important in our career?
- Any cheat sheets so we don't have to remember so much?

The contents mostly reflect my observations.  
We may get quite philosophical, but no political or  
religious comments please ...

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## Questions

- How do we make the right decisions – under conflict of interests, emotional stress, tough competition, financially difficult time?
- How should we conduct ourselves as a professional safety practitioner?
- How do we know we are making the right decision?
- What if we have made a wrong decision?
  - A slap on the wrist, a citation, a fine?
  - Loss of reputation, disgraceful, discredited?
  - Loss of license?
  - Serious criminal offences?
  - Loss of human lives?
- How do we face ourselves after failure?

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## True or false?

- It is ok to make mistakes
- It is ok to cut corners
- We do not need to play by the rules. Why bound by the rules?
- I will never break a law wilfully

The answer to the above questions:  
It depends

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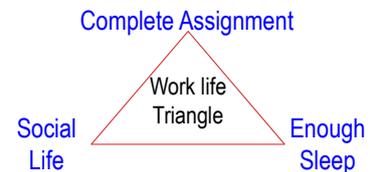
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## There is a line to divide what is right and what is not

### OK or not?

- You want to strike a balance between work and social life. Due to many networking and gathering events, you put a work assignment aside for quite a while without progressing
- You were tasked to conduct a safety audit for construction sites A, B, C. They were managed by the same contractor and identical in nature/status. After visited A and B and spotted very similar findings, you drove past Site C and saw that it looked the same as A/B. To meet tight deadlines, you included C in the report for all sites with the same overall findings
- The management asks you to re-design a car with less parts so that it has better fuel consumption and better profit, but less safety considerations though it can still meet the safety standard



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## How do we make decisions?

- Safety practitioners are trained to conduct safety assessments and give advice
- Conflicts of interests between the public, the government and industries, clients and contractors, management and workers, are getting more and more intense and complex
- We often make decisions or give advice to management, involving **moral and ethical elements**
- These decisions are rarely black and white but with uncertainties

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## Ethics is...

- Ethics is concerned with what is good for individuals and society, it helps us to choose what “good” is
- Ethics is a system of moral principles, valued behaviors, and beliefs that guide us to make judgments and form the basis of our profession and working culture
- Ethics refer to a set of rules established by a recognized body based on the group’s common beliefs of what is the acceptable moral standards and behaviour to the group, e.g., codes of conduct in workplaces or principles in religions

In our context: Ethics is the selected moral principles/norms acceptable and agreed by a group, based on the group’s beliefs and values, in addressing the relationship between the members of the group and people, business, society, and environment

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## Why is it important in our career?

- The study of ethics can help us develop moral competence to guide us making moral decisions and lead our lives under uncertainties  
Moral competence is the ability to resolve problems and conflicts on the basis of one's moral principles through deliberation and discussion ...instead of through violence and deceit, or through submitting to others....
- Ethical behavior follows the majority of social norms agreed by the recognized body; such actions are acceptable to the public and typically involve demonstrating respect for key moral principles that include honesty, fairness, equality, dignity, diversity, individual rights, etc.
- Unethical behavior are actions that (are opposite to the previous line) fall below or violate the standards in our field – safety & health practitioners

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## Ethics vs morals

- While ethics and morals are sometimes used interchangeably in addressing “right and wrong”, “good and bad”, they can be different
- Ethical behaviors are those **conforming to accepted standards of conduct**, which can change over time and vary between countries, cultures, professions. They are external, documented, agreed
- Morals refer to an **individual's own principles and values** regarding good and bad. Values and morals vary from person-to-person and can often be in direct conflict and opposition to another's. It is internal and related to one's belief
- *“Many people think of morality as something that's personal and normative, whereas ethics is the standards of “good and bad” distinguished by a certain community or social setting, ..., Ethicists today, however, use the terms interchangeably, the onus is on the ethicist to state the definitions of both terms”* Encyclopedia Britannica

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## Ethics $\subseteq$ Moral, is ethics part of moral?

- Can there be actions that are ethical but morally wrong?  
Some societies accept marijuana for leisure use, but some view it immoral to take narcotics  
Some countries still practicing capital punishment for hideous crime, but often viewed as immoral by some individuals
- What about morally right by some but unethical by others?  
Shoplifting in order to feed a hungry child in immediate need – Robin Hood
- Is it ethical or moral to provide the same services with different pricing to different people?  
Transit companies give discount to elderlies
- What was considered ethical before may be unethical now?  
Smoking at workplace or during air travel, corporal punishment, gender/racial discrimination...

Ethics dictate what practical behaviors are allowed, while  
morals reflect our intentions yourdictionary.com

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## Ethics = law? Legal = ethical?

- There are people who believe that if something is legal, it is ethical. Do you agree?
- *Ethics is knowing the difference between what you have a right to do and what is right to do*  
*Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court Potter Stewart*
- Code of ethics is enforced by the body developed it
- Laws
  - Rules enforced by governments to regulate society
  - Provide balance in society and protection to its citizens
  - Those violating them can be punished by jail sentences

If it is illegal, is it unethical?

Typically, an illegal deed is unethical, while an unethical action may or may not be illegal

	Ethical	Unethical
Legal	Legal Ethical	Legal Unethical
Illegal	Illegal Ethical	Illegal Unethical

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## Quick check

Actions	Ethical / Moral?
You volunteered at a professional institution as a committee member. After a morning site visit event, you invited the site visit host for a quick lunch at a local café. You charged the expenses to the committee	Lunch is HK\$120 (USD15)? Lunch is HK\$2000? You bring 10 friends along?
Your supervisor gave you several urgent assignments and demanded you to finish them by the next day. You asked your friend to help you	Your friend works for a competitor ? Your friend works for the same team? You do as much as you can? You tell your supervisor what you can finish by tomorrow?
You were asked to conduct an audit of a food factory. You had not done it before and were not comfortable in doing so. You knew another safety auditor in your team is competent in leading this task	You take the task? You recommend the other team member to lead?
Your supervisor sent you to Hawaii to complete an assignment. You took the opportunity to spend a few more days for sightseeing	You call in sick for the extended leave? You ask your supervisor to go with you too? You apply for annual leave and followed company guidelines?

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## Ethics checklist

### Is it Legal?

- ✓ Will I be violating any civil law or institutional policy?

### Is it balanced?

- ✓ Is it fair to all concerned?
- ✓ Does it promote win-win situations?

### How will it make me feel about myself?

- ✓ Will I be proud?
- ✓ Would I feel good if newspaper published my decision?
- ✓ Would I feel good if my family know about my actions?

A person adopts a high ethical standard keeps himself away from the 'grey areas' though these are not prohibited by laws

[https://hkbedc.icac.hk/edm/en/why\\_professional\\_ethics\\_matters](https://hkbedc.icac.hk/edm/en/why_professional_ethics_matters)

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## Let's look at our other topic, professionalism

- Professionalism
  - is the conduct, aims, qualities, competence, skill, etc., that characterize or mark a profession or a professional person
  - includes integrity, courtesy, honesty, competency, specialization, ...
  - goes **beyond** observing the profession's ethical rules
  - consistently willing to comply with the **highest ethical standard** both in the work you do and the way you behave – your behavior

Professionalism is the conduct, behavior and attitude of someone in a work or business environment that complies with the highest ethical standard of the profession

**PROFESSIONALISM:**  
It's NOT the job you DO,  
It's HOW you DO the job.

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**HKARMS** **Profession vs professional vs professionalism**

- Professional is a person who belongs to a profession while professionalism is the status, methods, character or standards expected of a professional or of a professional organization, such as reliability, discretion, evenhandedness, and fair play

How do we safety practitioners demonstrate professionalism?

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**HKARMS** **Examples of professionalism traits**

- Workplace etiquette is respect, good manners, and good behavior all rolled into one at our work, meeting, communication, correspondence, and social interactions
  - Honor your commitments
  - Be attentive, responsive and proactive
  - Get to know the workplace culture
  - Keep personal matters to a minimum
  - Dress and communicate properly
  - Be mindful of others
  - Silence your phone at meetings
  - Keep the workplace clean and tidy
  - Arrive scheduled activities on time

Handle yourself professionally

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## Professional safety practitioner vs unprofessionals

Professional	Unprofessional
Learns every aspect of the job, follow rules	Skip learning process and rules if possible
Discovers what is needed and wanted	Assumes what others need and want
Looks, speaks and dresses professionally	Sloppy in appearance and speech
Competent and understand the limitations	Untrained, work outside qualified boundaries
Does not let mistakes slide by	Ignores and hides mistakes
Stay focused on difficult assignments and completes tasks on time	Tries to get out of a difficult job and surrounded by unfinished tasks
Handles money and accounts very carefully	Sloppy with money or accounts
Look for continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities	Pass on learning opportunities or attend CPD course just for the certificate

Professional safety practitioners demonstrate a strong commitment to CPD opportunities – lifelong learning

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## Examples of unethical/unprofessional conducts

- Endless list of past cases and examples
  - Deceptive professional practices, unethical education/qualification documentation
  - Misuse of statistics, under-reporting of incidents
  - Irresponsible experts
  - Misconduct, plagiarism, forged data
  - Abuse of authority
  - Abuse of confidentiality, tendering info leakage
  - Incorrect information, falsified payment invoice
  - Substandard works
  - ..... Source: [The Encyclopedia of World Problems & Human Potential](#)

Professionals abide by the code of ethics/conducts establish by their profession

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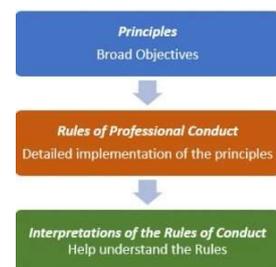
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## Professional code of conduct

- A set of codified professional ethics principles written and maintained by a professional body
  - Based on the profession's awareness of what is right
  - Prescribing minimum standards of appropriate behaviour in a professional context
  - Every members of the profession should conform to
- Sit alongside the general law of the land and the personal values of members of the profession for the promotion of ethical decision-making by members of that profession

Code of ethics is like a COP for our conducts.  
A breach of a code of conduct usually carries a professional disciplinary consequence



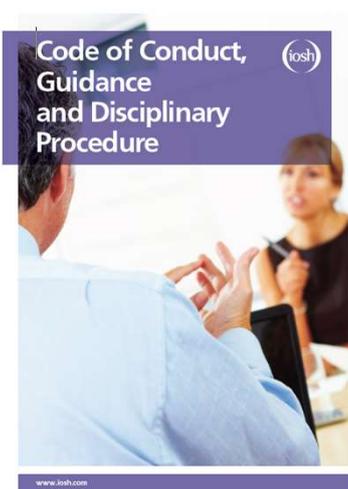
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## IOSH Code of Conduct

<https://iosh.com/media/6325/iosh-code-of-conduct.pdf>



- Part 1 Code of Conduct
- Part 2 Code of Conduct – Guidance
- Part 3 IOSH Disciplinary Procedure

**Integrity • Competence • Respect • Service**

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## IOSH Code of Conduct

**Read Later**


### 1 Integrity

Members are required to:

- 1.1 **Be honest;**
- 1.2 Abide by the law;
- 1.3 Notify the Institution **in writing** promptly if they have been
  - (a) convicted of a criminal offence by a Court or
  - (b) charged with a criminal offence contrary to health and safety legislation or
  - (c) adjudged bankrupt or have entered into a formal arrangement with their creditors; and
- 1.4 **Avoid conflicts of interest** wherever possible and if one arises promptly **take appropriate steps** to manage it.

### 2 Competence

Members are required to:

- 2.1 Ensure they are **competent** to undertake proposed work;
- 2.2 Ensure persons working **under their authority** or supervision are competent to carry out the tasks assigned to them;
- 2.3 Undertake appropriate **continuing professional development** and record it in the manner prescribed by the Institution; and
- 2.4 Ensure that they make clients, employers and others who may be affected by their activities **aware** of their levels of competence.

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## IOSH Code of Conduct

Read Later



**3 Respect**  
Members are required to:

- 3.1 Cooperate fully with IOSH and abide by its Charter, Byelaws and Regulations;
- 3.2 Respect the rights and privacy of other people and organisations;
- 3.3 Cooperate with employers or clients in fulfilling their legal duties under the terms of their employment or consultancy contracts;
- 3.4 Have due regard for the effect their professional activities may have on others;
- 3.5 Ensure that their professional and business activities are reasonable; and
- 3.6 Respond promptly and appropriately to disputes and complaints.

**4 Service**  
Members are required to:

- 4.1 Ensure that the terms of appointment and scope of work are clearly recorded in writing;
- 4.2 Ensure that, where necessary, they have adequate professional indemnity insurance when providing consultancy services;
- 4.3 Carry out their professional work in a timely manner;
- 4.4 Ensure that professional advice is accurate, proportionate and communicated in an appropriate format;
- 4.5 Have due regard for levels of service and customer care reasonably expected of them; and
- 4.6 Inform any person overruling or neglecting their professional advice of the potential adverse consequences and keep a written record of the date, time and nature of this action.

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## Code of Conduct – the Federation of Hong Kong Occupational Safety and Health Associations

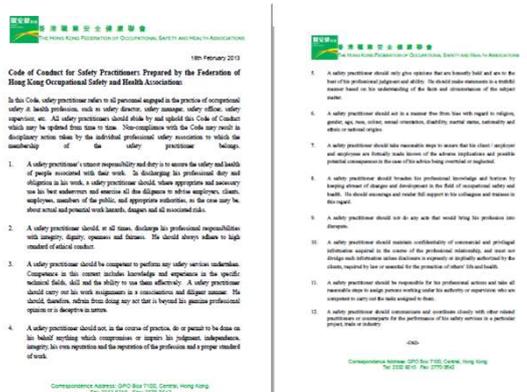
Read Later



In this Code, safety practitioner refers to all personnel engaged in the practice of occupational safety & health profession, such as safety director, safety manager, safety officer, safety supervisor, etc. All safety practitioners should abide by and uphold this Code of Conduct which may be updated from time to time. Non-compliance with the Code may result in disciplinary action taken by the individual professional safety association to which the membership of the safety practitioner belongs.

1. A safety practitioner's utmost responsibility and duty is to ensure the safety and health of people associated with their work. In discharging his professional duty and obligation in his work, a safety practitioner should, where appropriate and necessary use his best endeavours and exercise all due diligence to advise employers, clients, employees, members of the public, and appropriate authorities, as the case may be, about actual and potential work hazards, dangers and all associated risks.
2. A safety practitioner should, at all times, discharge his professional responsibilities with integrity, dignity, openness and fairness. He should always adhere to high standard of ethical conduct.
3. A safety practitioner should be competent to perform any safety services undertaken. Competence in this context includes knowledge and experience in the specific technical fields, skill and the ability to use them effectively. A safety practitioner should carry out his work assignments in a conscientious and diligent manner. He should, therefore, refrain from doing any act that is beyond his genuine professional opinion or is deceptive in nature.

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## BCSP – Code of Members' Professional Values and Behaviour

https://www.csp.org.uk/publications/code-members-professional-values-behaviour

**Read Later**


The Code is built around four key principles:

**1. Taking responsibility for your actions**

- Demonstrate appropriate professional autonomy and accountability
- Act within their individual scope of practice
- Make informed decisions.

**2. Behaving ethically**

- Adhere to legal, regulatory and ethical requirements
- **Act with integrity, honesty and openness**
- Engage with relevant professional and social contexts.

**3. Delivering an effective service**

- Put the **needs of service users** at the centre of their decision-making
- **Respect** and support individuals' autonomy
- **Communicate effectively**
- **Work effectively** with others.

**4. Striving to achieve excellence**

- **Seek to continuously improve**
- Demonstrate innovation and leadership
- Support others' learning and development
- Support the development of physiotherapy.

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## Quick check II

Actions	Ethical / Professional?
You signed up for a site visit trip with IOSH-HK to Shanghai. The cost was HKD5600 but there was a clause in the flyer saying that the “registration” fee was HKD1000. The organiser was too busy to chase you for the balance until after the trip	You pay for the balance? You ignore the request? You argue that it is their mistake and refuse to pay for the balance?
You and your colleague worked together on a safety assessment, but at the meeting with management, he took full credit for it	You yell out at the meeting and tell everyone what you have done? You say nothing and move on?
Your supervisor asked you to evaluate 10 different brands of safety helmets. You have found two brands stood out from the rest. To save time, you only presented one of the two brands and the failed products	It is OK because it is a good choice? You should have conducted additional analyses to distinguish the two?
You were asked by your father-in-law, who is a potential bidder, to disclose the tender assessment criteria of a construction project. It would be unfair to other bidders if you acceded to your father-in-law's request	You tell your father-in-law in order not to jeopardise the relationship? You disqualify his bid and call the police? You remind him that the criteria is posted on the website?

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## More checklist



- ✓ Am I familiar with and abiding by the code of conduct of my profession?
- ✓ Am I fully aware of the nature of my work and familiar with the relevant regulations, standards, and COP?
- ✓ Have I conducted the proper risk assessments and taken reasonable steps to mitigate and monitor both the actual and possible safety & health side effects of people associated with their work?
- ✓ Am I meeting my responsibility to act with integrity, honesty and openness, and to protect the safety and respect the rights of consent of human subjects, and ?
- ✓ Am I prepared to accept responsibility for the results, both good or bad, of my work?
- ✓ Am I keeping my CPD up to date and committing to a lifelong learning habit?

It is our duty to take reasonable care **not** to create a hazard that will cause physical harm to members of the public

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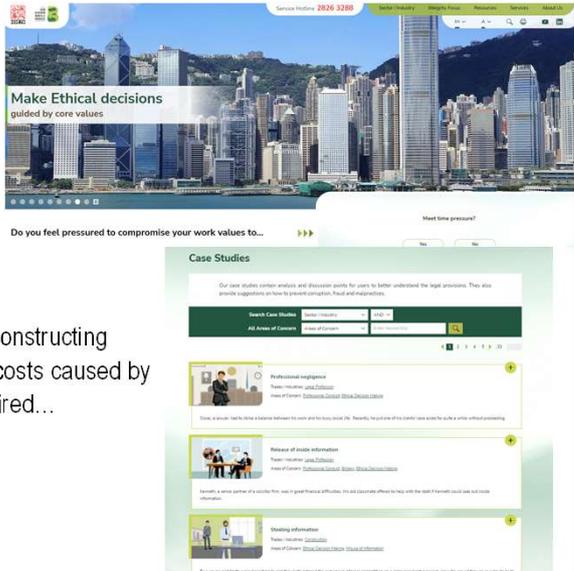
## Additional info – Hong Kong Business Ethics Development Centre

<https://hkbedc.icac.hk/edm/en>

- Resources to download
  - Practical guides
  - Training videos
  - E-learning materials
  - Code of conduct examples
- Case studies by sectors

A sub-contractor of a railway station project was responsible for constructing bored piles for the foundation works. To avoid the heavy penalty costs caused by project delay, he decided to construct shorter bored piles as required...

How to resolve



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## Takeaway

The study of ethics and professionalism can help us develop moral competence in our practice

Safety practitioners' utmost responsibility and duty is to ensure the safety and health of people associated with their work

Demonstrate a strong commitment on lifelong learning – CPD

It is not the job we do  
It is how we do our job

Every time I face a moral dilemma, I remember what my friend once advised me:

**Take the high road**

To take the course of action that is the most moral, ethical, professional, especially after or in the face of negativity or ill treatment, you will never regret it

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End

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