

Workplace Safety and Insurance System Strategic Plan 2009

April 2009

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
WHERE WE ARE TODAY: The State of Workplace Safety and Insurance in Nova Scotia	2
WHERE WE ARE GOING: System Strategic Direction	5
GETTING FROM HERE TO THERE: Strategy	7

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE SYSTEM RELATIONSHIPS AND COLLABORATION	11
APPENDIX B: WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE SYSTEM PLANNING CYCLE	15

Workplace culture – ...a process of ‘sense making’ where workers interpret patterns of action to uncover ‘how things work around here.’...

Dov Zohar, Toronto Institute for Work and Health

INTRODUCTION

To immerse themselves in workplace culture workers take cues from one another and most significantly from their leaders, on everything from work ethic to health and safety. When it comes to workplace health and safety, an organization may have a policy and may even have it posted on a wall as a reminder to all. However, a supervisor who encourages workers to stop production until they repair a guard on a machine sends a clear message about what an organization values more – production levels or the health and safety of its workers.

Many of Nova Scotia’s employers and workers care about workplace health and safety and take the necessary steps to prevent injury – or worse, fatality. Yet, statistics demonstrate that too many people are injured at work. They also demonstrate the significant human and financial toll that workplace injury has on individual lives as well as on our economy.

The Workplace Safety and Insurance System is a collection of individuals and organizations (see Appendix A) working together to change that, and those same statistics that highlight the magnitude of the problem demonstrate that, while there is still much work to be done, the number of workplace injuries is decreasing. With sustained effort on everyone’s part we will continue to move in the right direction – a province in which even one injury is unacceptable.

At a recent meeting of the Coordinating Committee, the Heads of Agencies Committee and the System Performance Advisory Committee it was discussed at length the value of revisiting the Workplace Safety and Insurance System Statement of Principles and Objectives, given that the strategic plan is now in its fourth year. The Coordinating Committee has agreed to lead a review process which will include stakeholder consultation. ‘Communication’ will be one of the primary areas of concentration. It was acknowledged that there is a need to share a broad understanding of the System’s goals and objectives and thereby the purpose for coming together under a common Workplace Safety and Insurance System banner.

Mission of the Workplace Safety and Insurance System

Working together to help keep people healthy and safe at work, to insure against loss and to support workers' rehabilitation.

We strive to be fair, open and responsible in everything we do.

WHERE WE ARE TODAY: The State of Workplace Safety and Insurance in Nova Scotia

How are we as a province performing in the ring of workplace health and safety? Are we concerned about the number and severity of injuries and fatalities? Are the efforts of the four partner agencies tasked to administer the system achieving the desired outcomes? Are workers and employers doing their part to build and maintain safe, healthy workplaces? We strive to answer these questions through two primary sources of information: (1) by monitoring Workplace Safety and Insurance System performance and (2) by obtaining the opinions of and feedback from those that the System is intended to serve – workers and employers.

System Performance

Performance of the Workplace Safety and Insurance System is monitored on an on-going basis, using as its yard stick a scorecard of key performance indicators – indicators identified by members of the System Performance Advisory Committee as those most important to the System's stakeholders. While no single individual or organization can take full responsibility for Nova Scotia's workplace health and safety short-comings or successes, the scorecard enables us to gauge how we as a province are performing in reference to other Canadian jurisdictions, and whether workplace health and safety outcomes are trending in the desired direction.

A comprehensive look at performance can be found in the Workplace Safety and Insurance System 2008 Year End Report, which can be obtained online at www.wsis.ns.ca or from any of the partner agencies. Provided below is a synopsis of those indicators of particular note and that most influence the make-up of the 2009 strategic plan.

Injury Rate

Workplace injury rate represents the number of time-loss injuries that occur per 100 workers. In 2008 the province's injury rate continued to decrease, and at year-end stood at 2.48 versus a 2007 year-end rate of 2.57. Credit for this progress must be given to a number of parties: employers for their focus on the health and safety of their workers, workers for taking steps to protect themselves and their co-workers, the Occupational Health and Safety Division for the awareness and enforcement roles they play, the Workers' Advisers Program for their on-going efforts to help workers and employers be more aware of workers' compensation and occupational health and safety issues, the Workers' Compensation Board for their promotion of workplace health and safety and efforts to help employers recognize opportunities to improve health and safety conditions, and safety, industry and worker associations for the support they provide to employers and workers. Throughout 2009, the Occupational Health and Safety Division and the Workers' Compensation Board will maintain efforts to increase awareness and further strengthen the province's workplace health and safety culture. In support of this, the two agencies will continue to seek opportunities to join forces for maximum benefit.

Stakeholder Satisfaction

The four System agencies individually measure stakeholder satisfaction on a number of factors. Measurement results for 2008 indicate no significant change in satisfaction levels over 2007, and throughout 2009 agencies will strive to maintain predominantly already high levels. A number of initiatives being continued or introduced during 2009 are anticipated to have an overall positive impact on stakeholders' satisfaction in the long-term. The Workers' Compensation Board, for instance, will continue to improve the way it interacts with and supports workers and employers, and establish tools and procedures to improve workers' prescription purchase experience. Representatives of the Workers' Advisers Program, Workers' Compensation Appeals Tribunal and Workers' Compensation Board will continue with development of a strategy to address issues and opportunities in the appeals system.

Stakeholder Satisfaction with Governance

On an on-going basis the System agencies engage a number of key stakeholders representing injured workers, labour and employers, seeking their input on various issues and developments. In 2008 a Stakeholder Engagement Index measure was established to gauge the overall satisfaction of those specific stakeholders with the level of engagement. Out of a possible 100, these targeted stakeholders rated their engagement in WSIS as 45. This result will form a measurement baseline for future years.

% Funded

The '% funded' measure gauges the overall financial health of the System. The funding strategy is tied to a number of factors, one of which is the Workers' Compensation Board's investment returns. While 2008 performance indicates progress on the fronts of injury reduction and safe and timely return to work, investment returns did not meet target due to the volatility in the global investment market. As a result, at year-end

2008, % funded is 60% - down from 75% in 2007. The WCB maintains a diversified investment portfolio designed to balance returns and risks. Therefore, it is anticipated that in time investment performance recover.

Stakeholder Input

Stakeholders (workers and employers) are the reason the Workplace Safety and Insurance System exists, and their opinions on 'how we're doing' are critical. Throughout the year stakeholders are provided with opportunities to share those opinions (i.e. on-going regular meetings of agency staff and stakeholder representative groups, formal consultation on pertinent issues). Information collected from stakeholders through these opportunities serves as important input into the Workplace Safety and Insurance System strategic planning process (see Appendix B).

Key themes of stakeholder input identified throughout 2008 include:

- Satisfaction with and desire for continued focus on injury prevention initiatives,
- Opportunities to improve the stakeholder consultation process,
- Desire for continued collaboration of agency activity to better support system vision and goals and to improve stakeholders' system navigation experience,
- Concern regarding the implementation of some elements of the Workers' Compensation Board's physiotherapy program,
- Opportunities to improve the system strategic planning process, and
- Opportunities to reduce the litigiousness of the appeal system.

Stakeholders' ***Vision*** for the
Workplace Safety and Insurance System

Safe, healthy workplaces for Nova Scotians, and sustainable safety and insurance services.

WHERE WE ARE GOING: System Strategic Direction

The Workplace Safety and Insurance System's vision is informed by four **goals**, each described in further detail by a set of objectives. The four goals are:

1. Improve outcomes for workers and employers;
2. Improve service delivery;
3. Ensure effective governance of the System; and
4. Ensure financial sustainability of the System.

Table 1 identifies the objectives set for each, unchanged from recent past years.

Table 1: Workplace Safety and Insurance System Goals and Objectives

<p><i>Improve outcomes for workers and employers</i></p> <p>Reduce Workplace Injury</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase worker and employer awareness and knowledge of rights, responsibilities, risks and best practice related to illness and injury prevention 2. Encourage positive health and safety attitudes and behaviours 3. Increase compliance with legislative standards and the adoption of best practice 4. Improve health and safety outcomes <p>Safe and Timely Return to Work</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure safe and timely return to work 2. Improve the satisfaction of injured workers and employers with their return to work experience 3. Increase awareness of the benefits of safe and timely return to work
<p><i>Improve service delivery</i></p> <p>Accessibility of Information and Information Sharing</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase awareness and understanding of the system 2. Increase accessibility of service 3. Increase accessibility of information <p>Issue Resolution</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Issue the correct decision the first time 2. Increase the understandability of letters and decisions 3. Increase the efficiency of issue resolution 4. Increase worker and employer involvement in decision-making 5. Increase the fairness of the System
<p><i>Ensure effective governance of the Workplace Safety and Insurance System</i></p> <p>Formal Accountability Structure</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish an on-going agency committee to oversee the day-to-day implementation of the System plan 2. Produce agency quarterly reports and a semi-annual update on the System plan <p>Stakeholder Consultation</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase stakeholders' understanding of how they can influence policy/corporate/government decisions 2. Improve stakeholders' level of satisfaction with the meaningful opportunities they have to provide input into the policy development process, including inter-agency consultation 3. Adhere to agreed-to consultation process for policy development 4. Improve stakeholders' level of satisfaction with the meaningful opportunities they have to provide input into corporate decisions for the Workplace Safety and Insurance System
<p><i>Ensure financial sustainability of the Workplace Safety and Insurance System</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Full funding as outlined in the Funding Strategy 2. When long-term financial results are better than target, discuss gains sharing opportunities to increase benefits for injured workers, reduce employer assessment rates and/or expedite retirement of the unfunded liability

GETTING FROM HERE TO THERE: Strategy

This section describes the strategic approach and key system-level initiatives adopted for 2009, toward achievement of Workplace Safety and Insurance System objectives. These are complemented by agency-level strategic and business plans which focus primarily on the individual efforts of each independent organization.

Improve Outcomes for Workers and Employers – Reduce Workplace Injury

The Occupational Health & Safety Division and the Workers' Compensation Board will continue to jointly target high potential employers by providing services aligned to complement one another, including: compliance guidance, enforcement, prevention consultation and education, awareness through social marketing, and online tools and information.

The two agencies will also take steps to improve stakeholders' system navigation experiences toward better enabling them to leverage those injury prevention resources and expertise: changes to how the agencies obtain stakeholder input, how they conduct system planning, and how they actively (by working together) and visibly (through visual identity and communication) present themselves as independent but collaborative partners with a shared focus on workplace health and safety. These changes will not only benefit the goal of reducing workplace injury but other shared system goals as well, including safe and timely return to work, accessibility of information, issue resolution, accountability, and stakeholder consultation.

Work-limiting injuries and illnesses are contributors to poverty in Nova Scotia. Guided by the Department of Community Services and Labour and Workforce Developments' Poverty Reduction Strategy, the agencies' joint efforts to further increase awareness of injury prevention opportunities will help mitigate the risk factors associated with poverty.

Improve Outcomes for Workers and Employers – Safe and Timely Return to Work

Return-to-work success is influenced by many factors, including the state and availability of health care. Throughout 2009 the Workers' Compensation Board will continue to develop new and strengthen existing health care partnerships. In particular, the Workers' Compensation Board will take steps in 2009 to address stakeholder concerns regarding the implementation of some elements of the physiotherapy program. While this work will not be completed in 2009, the conversation will start us down the road to reaching a place where all parties are more comfortable with the approach.

A new focus for 2009, the Workers' Compensation Board will partner with Labour and Workforce Development's Skills and Learning Branch to identify and develop joint opportunities that focus on skills training and labour force reattachment – opportunities that will contribute to even stronger return-to-work outcomes. This initiative and others allow the agencies to actively and visibly present themselves as independent but collaborative partners, and will better enable stakeholders to leverage safe and timely return to work resources and expertise available throughout the system.

Improve Service Delivery – Accessibility of Information and Information Sharing

A number of steps have been taken over the past few years to improve stakeholder access to information: establishment of the Workplace Safety and Insurance System web site, the release of MyAccount, more rigorous policy consultation, development of a planning process that actively engages stakeholders, joint agency road shows, semi-annual stakeholder consultation sessions, establishment of the System Performance Advisory Committee, and development of the Stakeholder Counsellors System.

The agencies will continue to build on the existing mechanisms for information sharing and will explore opportunities to improve communication channels and stakeholder engagement. The Coordinating Committee will lead a review process of the Statement of Principles and Objectives, and stakeholder consultation and communication will be one of the primary areas of concentration.

Improve Service Delivery – Issue Resolution

The Issues Resolution Working Group has for the past several years worked to identify opportunities for process improvement within the workers' compensation appeal system. Activity resulting from this working group includes the establishment of joint training, joint appeals scheduling, and establishment of an appeals issues discussion group.

Throughout 2009 the Workers' Advisers Program, the Workers' Compensation Appeals Tribunal and the Workers' Compensation Board will jointly engage stakeholders in a process to come to a common definition of 'system litigiousness' and to develop an Issue Resolution Strategy that, among other things, will address those concerns with the existing appeal system as expressed by stakeholders over the past number of years.

Ensure Effective Governance of the System – Formal Accountability Structure

Significant efforts toward achievement of this goal were made as a result of the implementation in 2005 of a new governance structure, and as part of that, establishment of the stakeholder-represented System Goals Advisory Committee (now called the System Performance Advisory Committee). Stakeholders and the four system agencies continue to progress in their understanding of how to operate in a way that is best for workers and employers.

Ensure Effective Governance of the System – Stakeholder Consultation

Stakeholders have identified three items for which consultation is most important to them:

1. Workers' compensation policy development,
2. Changes that could have significant financial implications for either workers or employers, and
3. System strategic planning.

Since then, both policy consultation and system strategic planning processes that engage stakeholders at crucial points have been established. During 2008, stakeholders identified a desire to evolve the stakeholder consultation process in a way that better enables them to provide valuable input. Opportunities to do so will be identified and implemented in the coming year.

Ensure Effective Governance of the System – System Performance Measurement

The year 2008 saw the first full annual cycle of system performance monitoring using the stakeholder-defined system scorecard. Also during 2008 two new measures were developed – 'stakeholder satisfaction' and 'stakeholder satisfaction with governance'. During 2009 these two new measures will be put in place and results used to establish a baseline understanding of performance.

Ensure Financial Sustainability of the System

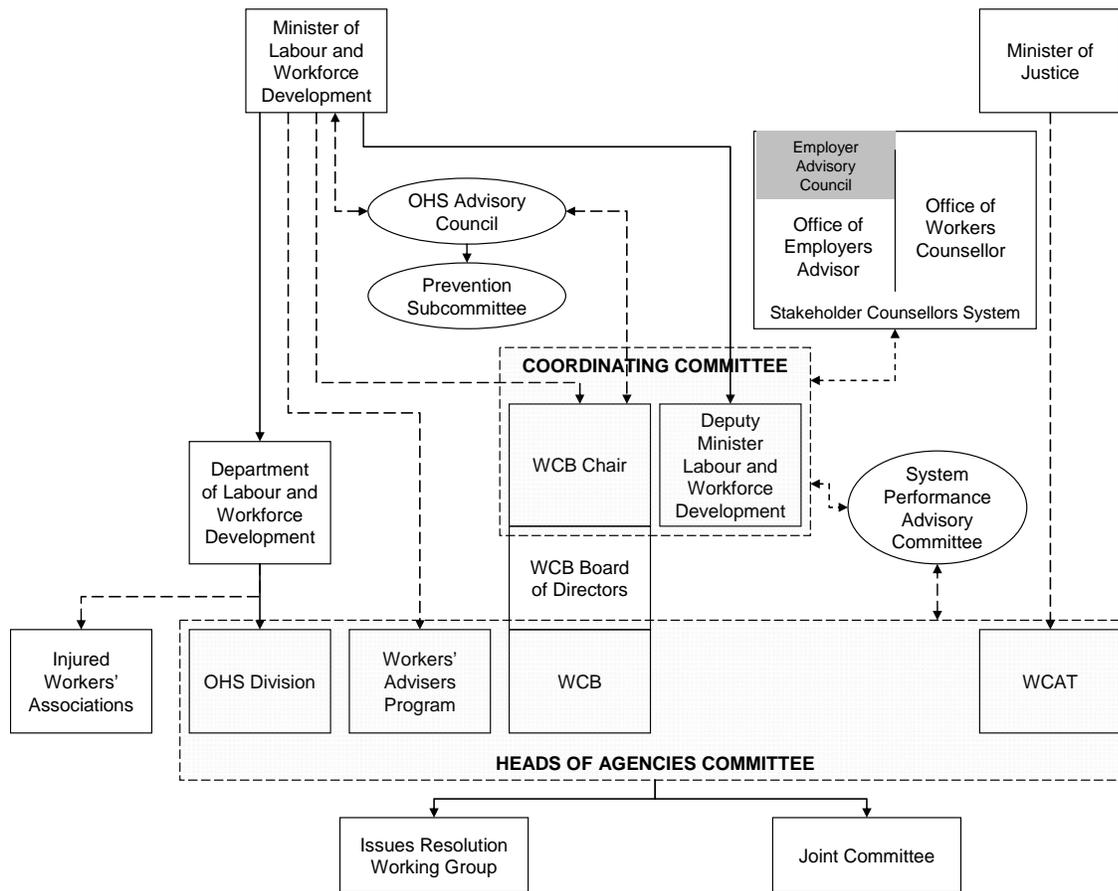
Achievement of full funding is critical to the longevity and fiscal sustainability of the system. The long-term investment cycle will by its nature yield periods of both loss and gain. The Workers' Compensation Board's investment strategy is conservative, and while recent losses have a significant impact on the strategy to achieve full funding, they are short-term. Over the long-term with a rebound in the market, gains will return us to a more favourable funding position.

APPENDIX A:

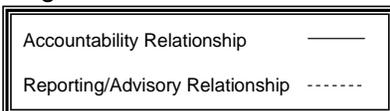
WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE SYSTEM – RELATIONSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

Nova Scotia's Workplace Safety and Insurance System is a collaboration of government, agencies, advisory councils, working groups and those that the System serves (workers and employers) - all working together toward a common vision. Figure 1 depicts the network of relationships within this System.

Figure 1: Workplace Safety and Insurance System Structure



Legend



GOVERNMENT

There are two areas of government that play a role in the Workplace Safety and Insurance System. The Minister of Labour and Workforce Development is responsible for Parts I and III of the *Workers' Compensation Act* and for the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*. As per the *Workers' Compensation Act*, the Minister is responsible for the appointment of the Chair and the representative members of the Board of Directors for the Workers' Compensation Board and for appointment of the Chief Adviser of the Workers' Advisers Program. As per the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* the Minister is directly responsible for the Occupational Health and Safety Division.

The Minister of Justice is responsible for Part II of the *Workers' Compensation Act* and for the selection of the Chief Appeal Commissioner of the Workers' Compensation Appeals Tribunal.

AGENCIES

Occupational Health and Safety Division of the Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Workforce Development

The mission of the Occupational Health and Safety Division is to establish, promote and enforce clear standards to reduce occupational injury and illness. The Division's objectives are to, with its partners, work to reduce the incidence of injury and illness of employees, improve the understanding of occupational health and safety standards by all workplace parties, and improve health and safety conditions in the workplace by means of research, compliance promotion, inspection, investigation and enforcement of legislation.

Workers' Advisers Program

The Workers' Advisers Program is responsible for the development, implementation and maintenance of a program to advise, assist and represent eligible injured workers who have been denied benefits under the *Workers' Compensation Act*.

Workers' Compensation Appeals Tribunal

The Workers' Compensation Appeals Tribunal is the first level of appeal external and independent of the Workers' Compensation Board. It hears and decides appeals filed by workers or employers and may involve claims-related issues or employer assessment matters. The Workers' Compensation Appeals Tribunal also has exclusive jurisdiction to determine whether the *Workers' Compensation Act* bars a right of action against employers.

Workers' Compensation Board

The Workers' Compensation Board is a workplace injury insurance agency responsible to administer the *Workers' Compensation Act*, provide prevention education and promote a culture of safety in the workplace.

STAKEHOLDER COUNSELLORS SYSTEM

The Stakeholder Counsellors System is comprised of two programs – one representing workers and the other representing employers. The two programs will run initially as pilots, each providing navigation support to their respective stakeholders. The employer program is currently administered through the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters and governed by an Employers Advisory Council comprised of representatives of key employer groups. The worker program is currently run through the Federation of Labour.

ADVISORY COUNCILS AND WORKING GROUPS

Key to the success of the Workplace Safety and Insurance System is a collaborative approach. Through consultation, the System's administrators strive to involve stakeholders on an on-going basis in order to understand their needs, priorities and perspectives. Several standing advisory councils and working groups have been established to serve that objective. To name a few:

The Occupational Health & Safety Advisory Council is a stakeholder advisory group whose purpose is to advise the Minister of Labour and Workforce Development on Occupational Health & Safety matters. The Prevention Subcommittee, a sub-group of the Advisory Council, advises council members specifically on prevention needs and priorities.

The System Performance Advisory Committee is comprised of representatives of the worker and employer communities, each of the four System partner agencies (Occupational Health and Safety Division, Workers' Advisers Program, Workers' Compensation Appeals Tribunal, and Workers' Compensation Board), members of the Occupational Health & Safety Advisory Council, members of the Workers' Compensation Board's Board of Directors, the Employers Advisor and the Worker Counsellor. The role of the Committee is to advise the Heads of Agencies on System performance, and on measurement of that performance. It is also the Committee's role to provide advice on how to improve System transparency and increase accountability to stakeholders.

Working groups are internal, operational groups, established as needed in line with identified System priorities. The Issues Resolution Working Group, for example, has been established to advise the agencies as to how to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of issue resolution within the System.

INJURED WORKERS ASSOCIATIONS

Injured Workers Associations are organizations that advocate on behalf of injured workers, providing a service beyond that provided by the Workers' Advisers Program. There are three funded associations, located in Cape Breton, Pictou and Halifax. These associations report to their members and the Department of Labour and Workforce Development.

WORKERS AND EMPLOYERS

The System exists to serve workers and employers, and in turn their input and advice ensures that the System sufficiently balances their present and future needs.

A number of mechanisms exist to solicit the input and advice of workers and employers, including regular stakeholder satisfaction surveys. Also, the annual General Meeting (spring) and stakeholder consultation session (fall) provide forums for workers and employers to ask questions of the System agencies and to publicly share their views.

Workers and employers also serve on standing advisory councils and working groups, such as the Occupational Health & Safety Advisory Council and System Performance Advisory Committee.

System Governance

The System Coordinating Committee is comprised of the Chair of the Board of Directors of the Workers' Compensation Board and the Deputy Minister of the Department of Labour and Workforce Development. Together, these two individuals are responsible for coordinating recommendations for legislative change, aligning the planning process with shared goals and objectives, and ensuring consultation and linkages between the Heads of Agencies Committee and the System Performance Advisory Committee.

The Heads of Agencies Committee is comprised of the heads of the four System agencies, namely:

- Director of the Occupational Health and Safety Division;
- Chief Workers' Adviser of the Workers' Advisers Program;
- Chief Appeal Commissioner of the Workers' Compensation Appeals Tribunal;
and
- CEO of the Workers' Compensation Board.

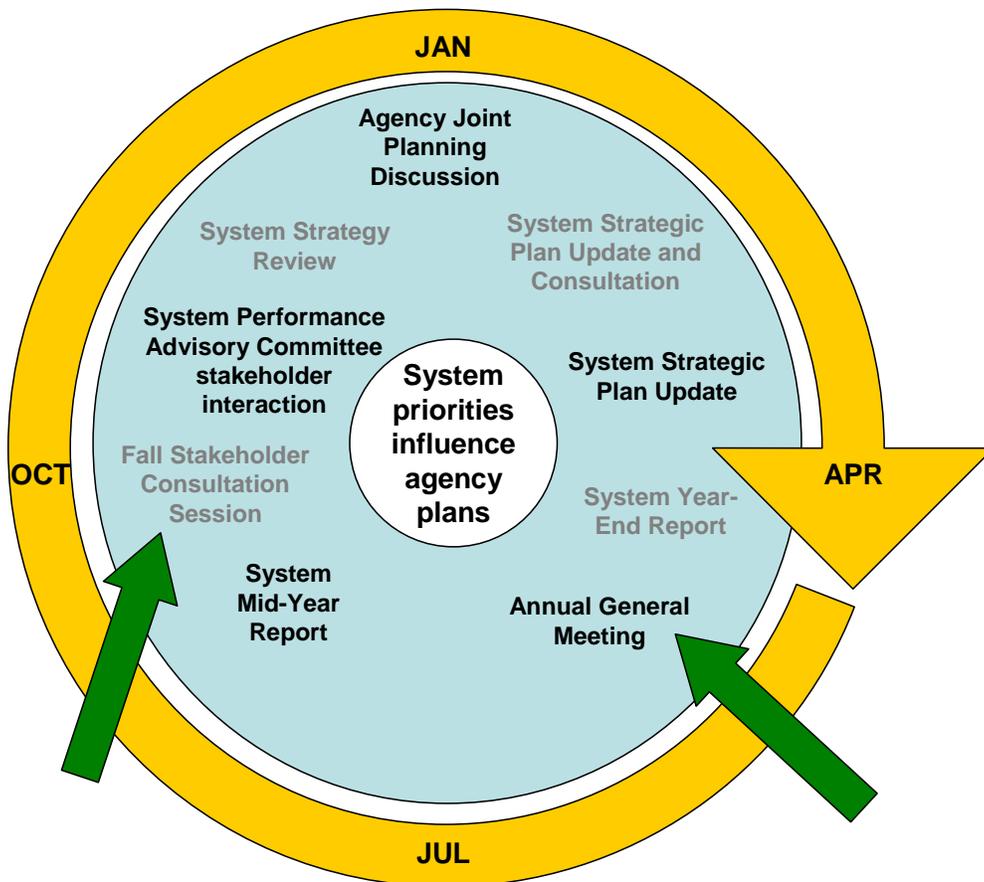
Members of the Heads of Agencies Committee are responsible for the ongoing delivery of service to workers and employers in the System, and for measurement and reporting of outcomes and progress in alignment with System goals. They are also responsible to coordinate strategic plan implementation.

APPENDIX B:

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE SYSTEM – PLANNING CYCLE

Figure 2 depicts the System planning cycle, and identifies among other things points in that cycle at which stakeholders have a formal opportunity to contribute.

Figure 2: Workplace Safety and Insurance System Planning Cycle



Fall Stakeholder Consultation Session

Agency-hosted event to obtain key stakeholder input concerning System priorities.

System Performance Advisory Committee Peer Consultation

System Performance Advisory Committee members consult respective represented groups concerning System priorities.

System Strategy Review

Agency Heads review existing strategy and update if necessary.

Agency Joint Planning Discussion

Agency Heads and staff assess System priorities and strategy, and identify initiative needs and opportunities.

System Strategic Plan Update and Consultation

Agency Heads review System Strategic Plan (and proposed revisions if applicable) with System Goals Advisory Committee members.

System Strategic Plan Update

Updated System Strategic Plan provided to Coordinating Committee and made available to stakeholders.

System Year-End Report

System Year-End Report provided to Coordinating Committee and made available to stakeholders.

Annual General Meeting

System Annual General Meeting, hosted by the Coordinating Committee