



Training

How CSP Certification Delivers Safety and Bottom-Line Returns

Vanessa Jo Roberts | Jan 23, 2020

Do you need a CSP certification? Does your safety chief? Here's a look at what it takes to become a certified safety professional and the value it brings to your business.

Most people initially consider becoming certified safety professionals for a personal reason: They want the opportunity to give themselves a career advantage in their chosen profession.

But it takes more than that to get a CSP certification. It takes passion, says Brian Nulty, a CSP and the director of risk management at MSC.

"Safety is a science, a science about behavior and culture," he says. "To develop a safety culture, it takes people who are both passionate and knowledgeable."

Read about one company's real-world approach to safety culture in our "Q&A With rPlanet Earth: How to Develop A Safety Culture in a Startup."

Nulty acknowledges that he originally decided to get a CSP certification when he was younger for the job growth potential. But someone really has to care about the work of safety to be successful in studying for certification and in passing the test, much less applying the learnings, he says.

"Anybody can call themselves a 'safety person,' " Nulty says. "Just like organic food, it's just a label. But the CSP certification validates that a person has both passion and knowledge."

"As with any degree or certification, it only tells others that you should know what you are talking about. It is still up to you to show them that you actually do."

Jeffrey Merkel, CSP
Safety Specialist, MSC

What Are the Benefits of a CSP Certification?

Achieving a CSP certification reveals the dedication that someone has to health and safety, adds MSC

safety specialist Jeffrey Merkel, who also has the certification. When your staff shows that dedication to practices to prevent occupational injury and illness, it brings value to your company, he says.

"A business that hires CSPs is demonstrating its commitment and investment in safety. It shows the employees at all levels that the business is serious about improving its safety culture and performance," Merkel says. "This generates trust within the organization, and this trust makes all things possible."

CSP Certification Will Definitely Boost Your Salary

While it might take as much as a year or more to prepare for the certified safety professional test, the certification will open new career avenues and improve your salary.

CSP certification adds \$13,000 to the median base salary for all full-time safety, health and environment professionals, according to the BCSP and ASSE's **2018 SH&E Industry Salary Survey**. The CSP certification will add \$30,000 to your salary compared to the salary of a professional who has none of the possible 12 safety-related certifications, the survey adds.

"Degrees and certifications equal money and open doors to a more rewarding and higher paying future," says David McPeak, director of professional development at Utility Business Media, in an **article for Incident Prevention**. Over the life of a career, he estimates that the CSP certification could add up to \$300,000 more in total pay.

At the end of the day, the CSP certification also helps drive revenue. There's a clear connection between a track record of safety and winning work in the manufacturing industry, Nulty says.

He sees it both from the perspective of suppliers that choose to partner with companies that value security as well as when he works with new customers. "When people look at us, right off the bat, they ask about safety and certifications," he says. And they want details, he says.

People want to know that the businesses that they work with today are invested in socially responsible best practices—practices that protect employees and the environment, he explains.

Being able to produce certifications for your safety team (like the CSP or the associate safety professional) and for your business (like ISO 45001 on safety and health) immediately establishes a company's bona fides. "It's not just talk," he says.

Merkel stresses that a CSP is certainly not a requirement to be a good safety professional. "As with any degree or certification, it only tells others that you should know what you are talking about," he says. "It is still up to you to show them that you actually do."

The **American Society for Safety Professionals** points out that when organizations focus on safety, it leads to improved worker productivity, short-term revenue growth and long-term sustainability.

Ultimately, the most important value of having CSPs on staff "are the benefits to the frontline worker," points out David McPeak, director of professional development at Utility Business Media, in an **article for Incident Prevention**. "Better trained certified safety professionals develop more effective programs and provide a higher quality of training."

How Do You Measure the Value of Your Certified Safety Professionals?

It is possible to document the potential value of a business's safety investment in dollars, notes safety consultant Tom Cecich, CSP, in a *presentation about the financial aspects of safety*.

He does point out that ultimately saving lives defies quantifying. Even so, he shares an approach for calculating the return on investment in safety personnel and practices.

The things that make it tricky, he says, include:

- Identifying the true cost of injuries and illnesses. (Use our *Workplace Injury Cost Calculator* to determine these costs.)
- Assigning a cost to the impact of pain and suffering.
- Discovering the organizational inefficiencies from losses.
- Putting a value on the effect on employee morale.
- Defining the costs of assuring compliance.

It's possible with data, good data, Cecich says. He suggests that business safety teams must be sure to look at costs and expenses using data that is accurate, logical, timely, realistic and understandable.

But there's this paradox as well: "The better the safety performance of an organization, the more difficult it is to justify expenditures based on accident reduction," Cecich shares. "ROI (benefits) from safety investments become more intangible and harder to measure (and to justify)."

Learn more about the different safety career paths in "A Guide to Safety Professional Salaries and Certifications."

What Are the Safety Topics and Requirements for a CSP Certification?

The Board of Certified Safety Professionals provides CSP certification and proctors the four-hour exam. It and other safety organizations, like the American Society of Safety Professionals and the National Safety Council, provide multiple training opportunities to prepare for the certification test as well as for renewing certification every five years.

The certification definitely requires prep and training, Nulty says, because it covers multiple disciplines, including manufacturing, chemistry, biology and compliance—to name just four. Before taking the test, for instance, it's recommended that a would-be CSP read 15 books, he says.

There are several other requirements to determine eligibility, which BCSP outlines in its *"Complete Guide to the CSP."*

"The entire process took me about one year," Merkel says. "The first six months were devoted to obtaining the ASP certification. I started by taking a practice exam to find my strengths and weaknesses. Then, I set aside one hour almost every day to study and learn about those areas where I needed to improve."

How Do You Maintain Your CSP Certification?

The requirements for maintaining the CSP are impressive as well, Merkel says. "Every five years, a CSP is required to demonstrate that they have remained actively involved in the health and safety field and worked to increase their knowledge and competence."

Nulty explains that over the five years, you must gain 25 credits, which he says requires about 80 hours

spent on training each year. That training can take place through courses, at conferences and online.

"This knowledge makes me more effective at ensuring workers go home to their friends and families safe and healthy, which is my purpose in going to work every day," Merkel says.

Is your business safety chief a CSP? Do you want to bring that experience into your organization?

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