SOITSHA
Sociedad de Ingenieros y Tecnicos de Seguridad, Higiene y Ambiente (Society of Safety Engineers and Technicians, Health and Environment).

**PS:** When was SOITSHA established and what is its mission?
**Marcial:** SOITSHA was founded on May 24, 2000, in Maracaibo, Venezuela. Its mission is to promote, develop and encourage full compliance of laws and regulations related to SH&E protection, domestically and internationally, as well as to assist in training, education and related activities. We also promote high qualifications for safety professionals through our certification programs.

**PS:** Describe your professional background and your role as SOITSHA director general-president.
**Marcial:** I am an industrial engineer and occupational safety and health expert. I have 15 years’ experience working as an SH&E manager in the oil, gas and construction industries, and I am certified as a safety supervisor (Venezuela), crane inspector and trainer (U.S.), OHSAS 18000 lead auditor (U.K.), scaffold inspector (Nigeria) and trainer for safe driving (U.S.).

At SOITSHA, I manage the organization; coordinate and supervise area directors; develop relationships with governmental and nongovernmental institutions; serve as CEO; and approve policies and plans for continual improvement.

**PS:** What are the greatest SH&E hazards facing workers in Venezuela today? How is SOITSHA working to address them?
**Marcial:** According to Venezuelan statistics, musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are the main hazards Venezuelan workers face. SOITSHA has conducted training, led safety campaigns and supported university research to prevent MSDs among workers.

**PS:** Which SH&E standards must workplaces in Venezuela follow? How is the use of such standards encouraged in the workplace?
**Marcial:** Venezuela has been adopting several international standards through its own national standards institute, COVENIN. The main role of this organization is to translate international standards. Corporate SH&E standards are promoted by the National Oil & Gas Co., and some administrative SH&E resources are enforced by the National Administration of Occupational Health and Safety. SOITSHA is also beginning to develop recommended SH&E practices to help prevent occupational injuries and illnesses.

**PS:** What criteria must instructors meet to conduct SOITSHA training courses?
**Marcial:** Instructors must complete certified safety supervisor training and score at least 90%. SOITSHA has established a six-level system of classification for its instructors based on experience and performance.

**PS:** Has participation in these training courses improved injury rates within Venezuela’s workforce?
**Marcial:** SOITSHA builds a strong commitment with the professionals and workers it trains to prevent workplace injuries and illnesses. In addition to scheduled and paid training events, SOITSHA delivers free safety talks to universities, unions and communities to increase the safe behavior of people not only in the workplace, but in all daily activities. There is much more to do, but we have already started.

**PS:** Does SOITSHA work with safety organizations in other Central or South American countries?
**Marcial:** Yes. SOITSHA is representing Venezuela on the Latin American Safety and Health Association (ALASEHT), which represents the main safety associations of each country in Latin America. SOITSHA is looking for ways to develop and promote a Latin American Safety Professional Certification through ALASEHT.

**PS:** What are SOITSHA’s goals and objectives for the remainder of the year?
**Marcial:** SOITSHA’s goal is to increase international relationships to have a global vision and to increase our performance for the benefit of our stakeholders. We have already begun to build relationships with safety organizations worldwide, such as ASSE, BCSP, Canadian Society of Safety Engineering, Board of Canadian Registered Safety Professionals, Institution of Occupational Safety and Health, and National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health. We would like to learn from them and to share our experiences now that we have joined International Network of Safety and Health Practitioner Organizations.

Marcial Márquez García is director general-president of SOITSHA in Maracaibo, Venezuela. He holds a bachelor’s degree in industrial engineering and a master’s degree in environmental management from the University of Zulia in Venezuela. He may be contacted at m.márquez@soitsha.org or +58 414 6359665.