EPS: Please provide a brief description of your professional background and of your role as president of TFC & Associates.

TC: I retired about 10 years ago after 30 years working in corporate safety positions. The last position I held was vice president of environment, health and safety at GlaxoSmithKline, a global pharmaceutical company. Prior to that, I was with IBM and Allied Chemical. Since then I have done independent consulting and have worked with the Mercer/ORC consulting practice. I also teach in Tulane University’s School of Public Health and volunteer with ASSE and the Center for Safety and Health Sustainability.

EPS: How does the SH&E profession define sustainability?

TC: Good question. Defining sustainability from a safety perspective is part of the broader sustainability problem for our profession. The safety and health community has not yet embraced sustainability, even though it is completely relevant to our work. We have been left out of the discussion, which is why ASSE envisioned the Center for Safety and Health Sustainability concept and reached out to other organizations to build a global network.

A NIOSH blog from a year ago mentioned that “safety has not been asked to the prom.” The green movement has outstripped the role of workplace safety in sustainability, and this is not helped by the fact that we as SH&E professionals have not defined our role in sustainability. The Center’s vision statement aims to provide one, advancing the idea that protecting human life as well as the safety, health and well-being of customers (broadly defined) should be among an organization’s primary focus. You cannot have a viable or sustainable enterprise unless you properly account for the safety of workers, customers, neighboring communities and risks to people and property throughout an organization’s supply chain.

EPS: Why does it seem that SH&E professionals in the U.S. are unaware of the role they can play in sustainability? Is this also the case globally?

TC: I think safety has been defined narrowly and has not been part of the broader sustainability discussion, which is definitely the case globally as well. Much of the sustainability debate worldwide has focused on environmental impacts and on topics where there is a certain amount of moral outrage, such as with child labor, corruption, economic fairness and other issues. Safety, for many reasons, has not been elevated to that level of importance in discussions. Safety is perceived as an issue that occurs within four walls of an organization and only receives public attention when major tragedies occur, such as the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf or the recent factory fires in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

In the meantime, the International Labor Organization reports that 2.3 million people are killed each year as a result of occupational injury or illness. The safety community has not been able to get the focus on the daily incidents that result in fatalities, serious injuries and occupational illnesses.

EPS: What can be done to better integrate SH&E best practices into sustainability and to elevate safety overall in organizations?

TC: Most corporations want to be viewed as sustainable entities. Some want to be seen as responsible organizations to their stakeholders and investors, while others want to capture the competitive business and marketing value adopting sustainable business practices gives them. We need to elevate worker safety and health as a core aspect of what makes a “sustainable” organization.

EPS: Many organizations claim to be sustainable yet fall short when it comes to safety and health reporting. What can be done to change this?

TC: This is the heart of the matter. If we want safety and health to be viewed as a component of sustainability, we need to define what that is and how to measure it. When ASSE’s Council on Professional Affairs sponsored a Sustainability...
The safety and health community has not yet embraced sustainability, even though it is completely relevant to our work.

Taskforce chaired by Kathy Seabrook, we tried to answer that. We quickly determined that the safety and health metrics used to define sustainable organizations lack meaning and are not standardized.

Of the 150 to 200 different global sustainability reporting and rating organizations, most include a worker safety component in their reporting, but the safety information is not standardized, making comparison impossible. In most cases, the information collected does not relate directly to the effectiveness or commitment of an organization’s safety efforts. We are developing standardized metrics that are meaningful in that they aim to influence good safety performance and promote an organization’s commitment to safety. Global sustainability rating and reporting organizations are being encouraged to adopt metrics or indicators that would better represent good safety and health performance—the type you would expect to see in organization considered “sustainable.”

**EPS: Why are leading indicators so important in measuring and reporting on safety and health performance?**

**TC:** Leading indicators reflect what actions organizations are planning to implement and monitor in order to improve safety performance. Outcome metrics are only a rear view of where an organization has been. Outcome metrics are important, but those alone are insufficient to help improve future performance, which is what leading indicators do.

**EPS: What do you believe are the essential elements of safety and health sustainability, and how can these be incorporated into organizations worldwide?**

**TC:** The Center has developed key safety and health program indicators defining the elements you would expect to find in a sustainable organization. Included are key areas, such as what an organization’s values and beliefs are, how safety is included in operational excellence, what processes are in place to ensure oversight and transparency, how committed senior executives are to safety and health, what the organization’s code of business practices is and how an organization conducts itself from a safety and health standpoint throughout its supply chain.

We call these key program elements the Safety and Health Framework and are in the process of further defining how each of those elements is measured. We will trial-test these elements in a broad range of organizations, not just traditional businesses, as all organizations have the responsibility for being sustainable. An example of an organization that is not a traditional business is the U.S. Army, which has recognized the importance of sustainability and has submitted public reports of its commitments.

**EPS: What is the Center for Safety and Health Sustainability doing to promote the importance of safety as part of good corporate governance and corporate social responsibility/sustainability?**

**TC:** Sustainability is global issue. That is why we realized that even though ASSE is working to expand its global reach and influence, it does not have a critical mass of global professionals at this point to make the level of impact we hope to achieve. As a result, we reached out to international partners for collaboration. The focus is having a consistent voice for the importance of safety in sustainability discussions. We participate in meetings, comment on sustainability measures, such as the GRI initiative, conduct...
Some in the safety and health community say that sustainability is the passing fad of this past decade and that it will burn out. We do not see any evidence that this is the case.

EPA has published a final rule setting the residual risk and technology review conducted for the pulp and paper industry source category regulated under national emission standards for hazardous air pollutants. It finalizes amendments to the national emission standards for hazardous air pollutants that include a requirement for 5-year repeat emissions testing for selected process equipment; revisions to provisions addressing periods of startup, shutdown and malfunction; a requirement for electronic reporting; additional test methods for measuring methanol emissions; and technical and editorial changes. 

EPA expects the amendments to ensure that control systems are properly maintained over time, ensure continuous compliance with standards and improve data accessibility. EPA estimates facilities nationwide will spend $2.1 million per year to comply. This final action became effective on September 11, 2012. Click here for more information.