



Legacy Award Ontario Recreation Facilities Association (ORFA)

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members...”**

— John Milton
Chief Administrative Officer
ORFA

Taking the Safety Lead in Ontario’s Recreation Facilities

For the Ontario Recreation Facilities Association (ORFA), safety is not a destination, but a journey. The non-profit organization is the 2026 recipient of the Technical Standards and Safety Authority’s (TSSA) Legacy Award, which recognizes organizations and individuals who have demonstrated a history of safety.

The award is the result of an eight-decade journey dating back to the 1940s when most arenas in Ontario operated as a sideline business for companies producing block ice for neighbourhood ice boxes. At that time, many ice manufacturers built arenas beside their facilities, leveraging existing refrigeration systems designed for block-ice production, to create indoor skating and hockey rinks. The recreation sector continued to grow as post-war buildings like community centres and memorial arenas were adapted to serve as recreational facilities.

Building Competencies through Certification

Over the decades, ORFA has introduced professional certification to equip members with the skills and competencies required to operate facilities safely and effectively. Many members have since earned professional designations introduced by ORFA more than 30 years ago. Some of these professional designations, which are sought by employers during hiring, include the Certified Ice Technician (CIT) recognized by the National Hockey League, the Certified Arena Refrigeration Plant Technician (CARPT), the Certified Aquatic Technician (CAT) and the Certified Recreation Facilities Professional (CRFP), to name a few.

ORFA’s Chief Administrative Officer, John Milton, says the award is a strong validation of their role in promoting safety and compliance in Ontario’s recreation facilities profession.

“Safety is more than just a word or a single action; it is a culture that must be embedded throughout every operation,” says Milton. “Like a lighthouse, ORFA serves as a beacon for our members, providing the guidance, tools and leadership they need to keep their facilities and communities safe.”

In addition to certification, ORFA has been a consistent voice for the safe operation and maintenance of unattended registered industrial refrigeration plants. As these plants often do not require certified operators, plant owners are responsible for determining the

appropriate training and competency levels of personnel who operate and manage unattended refrigerated ice surfaces, which form an important part of Ontario’s recreational landscape. ORFA also works closely with TSSA’s Operating Engineers program to help identify emerging risks, operational gaps and workforce needs within Ontario’s recreation facilities sector.

“Recreation facilities are the hub of every community where people of all ages, abilities, genders and economic backgrounds gather to enjoy recreation,” stresses Milton. “They remain community hubs only when the professionals who operate and manage them keep them safe — a responsibility that ORFA embraces every day.”

Responding to an Evolving Recreational Landscape

Ontario’s recreational facilities have come a long way since ORFA was established in 1947 as the Ontario Arenas Association. What began as an organization serving arena operators has evolved alongside a recreation sector that now encompasses aquatic centres, sports fields, curling facilities, splash pads and large multi-use recreation complexes.

“People don’t typically think about how diversified recreational facilities are,” Milton points out, citing multi-million-dollar recreation complexes with various amenities built into one complex. “Recreation facilities have evolved significantly; so has our role as a recreation facilities association.”

Compounding the challenge is aging recreation infrastructure. Thousands of people may be using a community recreation facility at any given time. If the refrigeration plant or the aquatic setting in a pool isn’t managed and operated properly, failures can have safety consequences, he cautions.

Due diligence and an asset management plan that factors in safety are key to safeguarding the well-being of the public in recreational facilities. Looking for ways to constantly improve safety among owners and operators is a responsibility that never ends.

“As the Chief Administrative Officer for the past 37 years, I have worked with ORFA’s professional staff and volunteers to represent more than 8,000 members. Together, we support the recreation facilities profession by advancing professional development opportunities, value-added services and quality products,” says Milton.