



AMERICAN SOCIETY OF
SAFETY PROFESSIONALS



2024

Corporate Listening Tour Report

Tackling Today's Safety Challenges

Insights From ASSP's 2024 Corporate Listening Tour



ASSP is the community that protects people, property and the environment. Our goal is to have all workers return home to their loved ones safe, healthy and well each day.

As the guardians of workplace safety, we believe that safety, health and well-being are inherent rights of every worker. We strive to collaborate with our members, regulators, like-minded organizations and businesses to achieve this aspirational goal.

We recognize that achieving this goal requires understanding the safety challenges businesses face. That's why, over the past six years, we have convened the ASSP Executive Safety Forum, a group of nearly 60 ASSP members who are the top safety leaders in their organizations, each overseeing teams of at least 25 safety professionals. These individuals represent a broad range of industry sectors.

In addition, for the last four years, we have conducted an annual corporate listening tour with a broad cross-section of safety executives to gather their insights about safety challenges facing organizations today. This year, our conversations occurred shortly after the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) released the latest fatality and injury/illness data. According to BLS, 5,486 fatal work injuries were reported in 2022 — a 5.7% increase from 2021. This means that a worker dies every 96 minutes in the U.S. In addition, 2.8 million nonfatal injury and illness cases were reported, reflecting a 7.5% increase from 2021.¹ Clearly, more must be done to protect workers and improve their safety, health and well-being.

Our goal in understanding the trends and challenges impacting the occupational safety and health (OSH) profession is to ensure we are a trusted advisor to OSH professionals, as well as the workers and companies these individuals serve. This knowledge also helps us provide a strong professional community, support the ongoing development of future and current professionals, and deliver the greatest value to help OSH professionals better lead their organizations toward improved performance and business outcomes.

This report highlights five key findings based on the insights from our discussions. For each finding, we identify where it is having the greatest impact — workplace, work, workforce — and indicate the intensity of organizational focus needed — with immediate meaning “now” and mid-term meaning “near future.” We also highlight what these findings mean to organizations and OSH professionals and propose a set of questions to help spark discussions among safety teams, as well as with their colleagues and corporate leaders.

Five Key Findings

01

Focus on What Matters.

Prioritize preventing serious injuries and fatalities over minor incidents to avoid spreading resources too thin. This might mean accepting a slight increase in less severe incidents, but it's about spending time where it counts the most.

02

Manage Workforce Changes and Safety Priorities.

With shifts in the workforce and a shortage of skilled labor, keeping everyone safe becomes more challenging. High turnover and the struggle to attract and keep good employees increase the risk of incidents and employee burnout. OSH professionals should influence how new employees are trained and have input on strategies to retain them.

03

Embrace OSH-Related Applications of AI.

Technology, particularly AI, is constantly reshaping how we work. While this brings opportunities for safety improvements, it also introduces new risks. OSH professionals should focus on using AI to enhance safety while ensuring the organization doesn't neglect effective traditional safety practices.

04

Managing Cultural Shifts and Governance in Uncertain Times.

Economic and political uncertainties affect how businesses operate. OSH professionals can drive changes in organizational culture, making sure leaders take accountability for safety so they demonstrate the importance of safety even in uncertain times.

05

Empower Influential OSH Leaders in the Changing Workplace.

OSH professionals must maintain their technical skills and require organizational support to become better leaders who can drive operational excellence.

¹ "Injuries, Illnesses and Fatalities" U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS. <https://www.bls.gov/iif/>

Focus on What Matters: Preventing Serious Injuries and Fatalities

Impact: *Workplace* Intensity of Focus: *Immediate*

Resources are limited and expectations are high in today's business world. This year's insights highlight the importance of prioritizing preventing serious injuries and fatalities over simply focusing on incident rates. Instead of reacting to incidents, organizations can optimize their resources by focusing on prevention, particularly of those incidents known to have serious injury and fatality potential. Some organizations are also investigating/applying predictive analysis and early intervention to drive further improvements.

Many organizations are taking a more proactive, risk-based approach to safety, continuing the shift away from simply complying with regulations. To do so, they are integrating safety into all aspects of business operations through standardized management systems and looking to consensus standards to guide their efforts.

What This Means for Your Organization

Focus on preventive measures.

Focus on preventive actions, especially for incidents with high potential for severe harm, to maximize limited resources.

Invest in predictive analysis.

Identify potential issues and take preventive action before they escalate into harm-producing incidents.

Adopt a risk-based approach.

Promote the importance of identifying and addressing risks before they become incidents.

What This Means for OSH Professionals



Take a balanced approach.

Consider both leading (predictive) indicators and lagging (reactive) indicators to ensure a comprehensive safety strategy.



Use consensus standards.

Develop and refine the skills you need to effectively use standards like ANSI/ASSP Z10 and ISO 45001 to help your organization create robust safety management systems.



Demonstrate business value.

Demonstrate the tangible business value of safety efforts by effectively applying tools such as ROI analysis to show how safety initiatives align with overall business objectives.



Integrate with business operations.

Connect safety seamlessly into every level of the business, from top management down to frontline workers. "Safety professionals need to become better at communicating the value of what they do," says Matt Pierce, vice president of safety, quality and productivity at EMCOR Group Inc. "We need to talk about saving lives in terms of the impact on business outcomes."



Manage Workforce Changes and Safety Priorities

Impact: *Workforce* Intensity of Focus: *Immediate*

One of the greatest concerns for leaders is finding, training and keeping skilled workers, a challenge that isn't going away anytime soon. Contributing factors include high turnover rates, a critical shortage of qualified candidates, and a mix of permanent and temporary staff.

Leaders recognize that these talent challenges can lead to more incidents because new workers often lack experience or proper training, and as a result may take more risks or not know the safest way to perform their jobs.

In this environment, companies are struggling to protect worker safety, health and well-being. Changing demographics and cultural differences often contribute to this workplace challenge.

What This Means for Your Organization

Manage turnover.

Most organizations are struggling to find and retain good workers, especially in the skilled trades. Given the additional impacts of rapid growth and an aging workforce considering retirement, it's important to have plans in place to deal with turnover.

Build talent.

Examine your recruitment strategies to highlight your organization's commitment to investing in employees and their continued development and growth.

Transfer knowledge.

Design specific processes to help older workers share their knowledge and experience with newer employees. Consider leveraging technology to produce short videos and tablet-based learning to engage younger workers.

Recognize stress and burnout.

Pay attention to mental as well as physical health. Leaders are paying more attention to stress and burnout among their employees, knowing that these can also lead to more incidents.

What This Means for OSH Professionals



Help retain talent.

Collaborate with human resources, operations and other functions to influence how new employees are welcomed and trained to build engagement, create confidence and demonstrate commitment to their safety, health and well-being.



Develop inclusive, easily digestible safety communication and training.

Identify effective ways and maximize technology tools to help all employees learn and follow safety rules. "We're looking at how we provide, education, training in multiple different languages and formats," says Bob Callahan, chief human resources officer and corporate safety officer of Powell Industries Inc. Callahan also notes it's important to understand how younger workers learn best and to identify options, such as more graphics, to support learning among non-English speakers.



Support integration of health and well-being with safety.

Safety isn't just about avoiding incidents and physical harm, it also involves keeping everyone healthy and feeling good at work.



Understand changing risks.

Stay informed about new risks by interacting with colleagues and sharing information with all affected.



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Explore and Test OSH-Related Applications of AI

Impact: *Work* Intensity of Focus: *Mid-Term*

Technology continues to change the way we work, and it creates both opportunities and challenges for OSH professionals. Expanding uses of AI create new possibilities for how safety is managed. However, it's important to find the right balance between embracing innovation and maintaining proven safety practices.

AI has vast potential to help OSH professionals and their organizations analyze data more efficiently, identify problems faster and make better decisions. However, its use in identifying hazards and managing risks requires purposeful consideration and expert verification/validation.

What This Means for Your Organization

Embrace technology to enhance safety.

Explore new possibilities for identifying hazards, analyzing data, and making faster, more informed decisions. "One big struggle was getting people to believe and react to data," explains Paul Haining, chief EH&S officer, Skanska USA. "Technology is changing that. With access to more live data, we can combine incident data with leading indicators, which points more quickly to solutions."

Recognize that safety isn't an either/or option.

Identify and support both technology solutions and the critical technical expertise and oversight provided by OSH professionals.



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What This Means for OSH Professionals



Stay ahead of the curve.

Keep learning and adapting to new tools and techniques as they evolve.



Focus on results.

Go beyond collecting data to use your expertise to turn that data into action that improves workplace safety and better protects workers.



Find a balance.

Recognize that technology is not a replacement for human judgment. Embrace AI as a tool to support your work, not as a substitute for your expertise.



Learn from others.

Monitor how other industries are using technology and apply relevant strategies in your organization.



Managing Cultural Shifts and Governance in Uncertain Times

Impact: *Workplace, Work, Workforce* Intensity of Focus: *Immediate*

For the first time in four years, the impact of operating in uncertain times, both in terms of the economy and geopolitics, was a consistent discussion point. Leaders also continue to emphasize governance structures and decision-making processes that prioritize safety alongside profitability (environmental, social and governance or ESG).

What This Means for Your Organization

Use data to drive decisions.

Invest in collecting and analyzing safety data to identify trends, mitigate risks, inform decisions and allocate resources effectively.

Encourage cross-departmental interactions.

Facilitate collaboration between safety professionals, finance, operations and other departments to ensure safety is a core consideration in decision-making.

Plan strategically for the future.

Be prepared for economic and political fluctuations with focus on potential impacts on resources, supply chains and workforce stability. William Walkowiak, CSP, DAF, chief, occupational safety, Air Force and Space Force, puts it in a military context: "We need to keep safety relevant in the minds of safety leadership when there are no incidents," he explains. "I like to explain it this way, 'If we take safety out, we would reduce combat capability.' So, the message is safety increases combat capability. This new approach changes the framing of the dialogue."

Embrace safety as a value.

Encourage all leaders to cascade an accountability mindset throughout the organization. "There's a difference between accountability and responsibility," explains Nicole Thunich, CRM, executive vice president and chief safety officer with MV Transportation. "You can delegate certain responsibilities. But you can't delegate accountability."



What This Means for OSH Professionals



Show the value of safety.

Demonstrate how investing in safety can lead to better business outcomes, such as stronger brand reputation, higher customer value and operational efficiency.



Lead cultural change.

Making safety a value isn't about following rules – it's about creating an organizational culture where everyone is accountable for safety, from top leadership down.



Work collaboratively.

To promote organizational accountability for safety outcomes, collaborate with other departments to align safety goals with organizational goals.

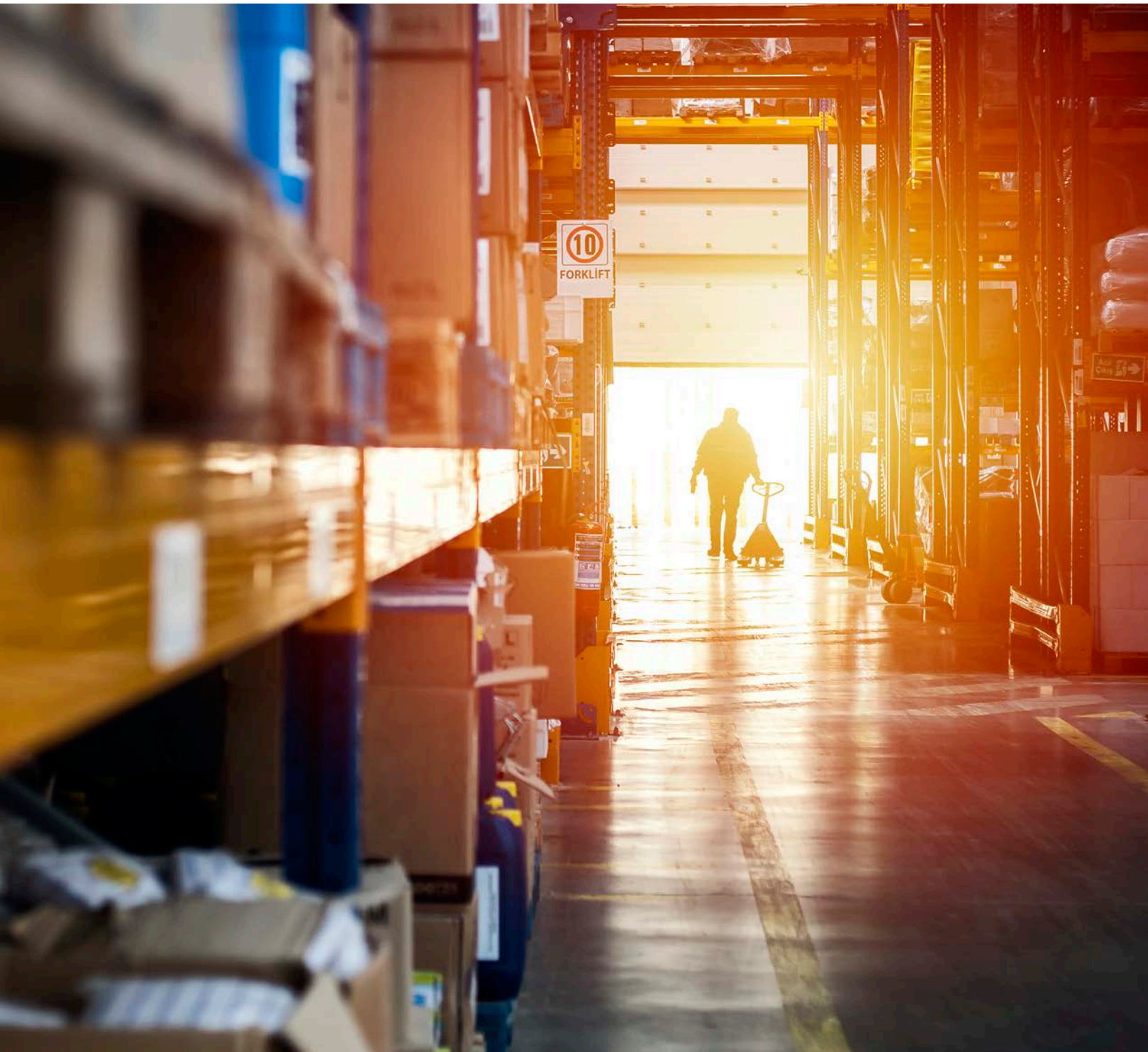


Empower Influential OSH Leaders in the Changing Workplace

Impact: *Workforce*

Intensity of Focus: *Immediate and Mid-Term*

Many organizations are emphasizing better integration of safety with overall business goals. For OSH professionals, this means actively engaging and collaborating with other organizational functions to create a safer workplace.



What This Means for OSH Professionals



Advocate for business value.

Show how safety initiatives contribute to broader goals like operational excellence to demonstrate the tangible value of safety to the organization.



Understand business impact.

Recognize how safety practices affect business aspects such as operations, finances and meeting customer expectations.



Manage risk.

Anticipate potential risks and develop proactive solutions to drive continuous improvement in the workplace.



Anticipate future challenges.

Monitor industry trends and regulatory changes and build partnerships and advocate for ongoing improvement to help prepare the organization for the future.



Navigating changing work environments.

Use a combination of technical expertise, people skills and adaptability to navigate the risks and challenges of the rapidly changing world of work.



Communicate effectively and demonstrate empathy.

Develop/refine soft skills to better connect with employees at all levels to help foster a culture of safety and well-being.



Demonstrate resilience and adaptability.

Practice adjusting to evolving safety concerns.



Stay current.

Monitor the latest technological advancements, regulatory requirements and industry trends.

Influential and Transformational Business Leader

Leaders expect a new kind of leadership from OSH professionals. They want OSH professionals to be more than just rule enforcers – they want them to be motivators and influencers who inspire everyone in the organization to prioritize safety and well-being.

What This Means for OSH Professionals



Share and learn.

Share what works and learn from others, both inside and outside your industry. This helps us stay up to date on the best safety practices and keeps our workplaces safe.



Build relationships and provide support.

It's not just about rules; it's about making everyone feel like they belong and have a stake in safety. Build relationships, provide resources and create a sense of community where safety is everyone's responsibility. "It's important to identify what actions we took to get everybody engaged, how we took everybody through," says Martin Coyd, global head of health and safety with Beck & Pollitzer. "We want people to feel they were part of it, to take pride. What we don't want there to be is complete silence, no 'job well done,' and no further mention."



Drive positive change.

Lead the way in making workplaces better and safer. This means driving initiatives that improve performance, make organizations more resilient, and set new standards for safety in any industry.



Communicate and influence.

Communication is key. You should be able to talk to anyone in the organization and inspire them to prioritize safety. By being a great communicator and influencer, you can get everyone on board with safety initiatives.



Continuously learn and provide thought leadership.

Adapt a mindset to always learn and grow. By staying on top of the latest trends and being thought leaders in our industry, you can lead the way to a safer and healthier workplace.



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Grow Network, Share Insights, Improve Capabilities and Advocate for the Profession

ASSP's important role in advancing safety and the profession was reinforced by the feedback from executives again this year. These leaders view ASSP as a trusted source and resource to help their organizations understand trends; provide education opportunities to key team members; offer resources to improve worker safety, health and well-being; and inform and influence policy leaders and regulators.

This creates an opportunity for ASSP to strengthen value to members and customers.

Build community and provide a platform for professionals to connect, share best practices and foster a sense of belonging. "As safety professionals, ASSP gives us somewhere to go to be together, to learn from our peers," says Evan Hardin, director of safety, health and environmental specialists at Fastenal. "The sense of community gives us a reason to engage." He also points to the value of learning different approaches to similar challenges to "bring best practices back home."

Advocate and share best practices that transfer knowledge and facilitate learning that drives continuous improvement in safety practices.

Support and facilitate peer-to-peer benchmarking and learning across organizations and industries.

Support professionals as they develop technical and leadership skills that enhance strategic thinking and address emerging challenges.

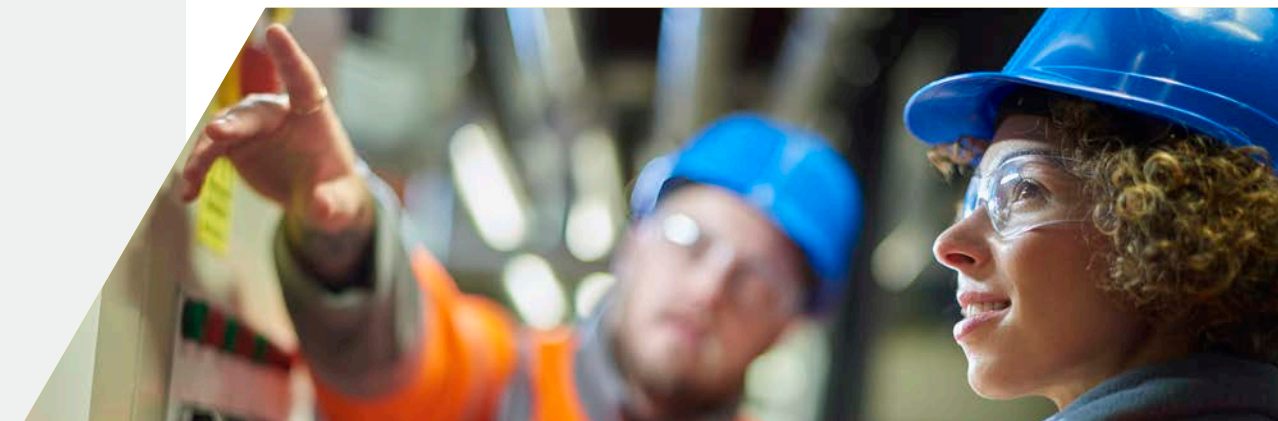
Advocate for the profession, lead conversations on safety innovation, and provide quality resources and training to inspire action and drive change.

Start a Conversation With Your Leaders

We encourage you to use the findings in this report to engage your leaders in proactive, ongoing conversations of how these trends are impacting your organization. These conversations and the answers to these questions can lead to program improvements and better understanding and integration across your organization.

Facilitation Questions

- 01 Which of these trends is affecting our company the most? Are our current measures addressing the issues effectively?
- 02 For the most important trends, are the expectations of OSH professionals the same or different in our organization?
- 03 How do the results in this report affect my role as an OSH leader in my company? What changes should I make to more effectively address these trends?
- 04 How can we spread awareness of these findings to other leaders in our company and get them involved in acting on safety issues? What tactics can we use to engage different departments or divisions?





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