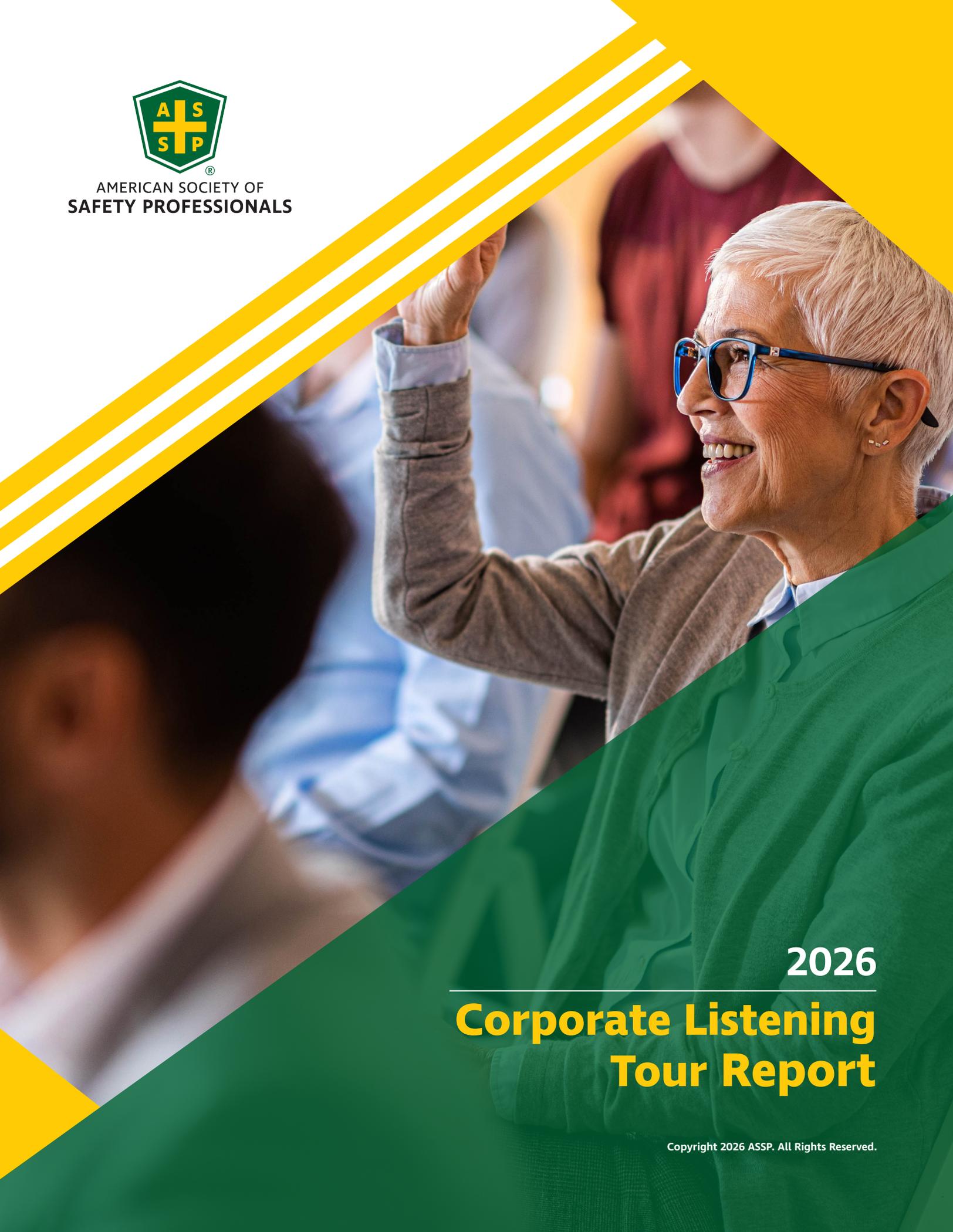




AMERICAN SOCIETY OF
SAFETY PROFESSIONALS



2026

Corporate Listening Tour Report

Copyright 2026 ASSP. All Rights Reserved.

From Insight to Impact — The Future of Workplace Environmental Health and Safety

ASSP's 2026 Corporate Listening Tour

At the American Society of Safety Professionals (ASSP), our mission remains steadfast: every person deserves to lead a safe, healthy and fulfilling life, returning home well at the end of every shift. But as the workplace landscape evolves at an unprecedented pace, our approach to protecting people, property and the environment must evolve with it.

For the past several years, we have committed ourselves to a global listening tour, engaging with executives and environmental health and safety (EHS) leaders across every sector to understand the pressures they face. We heard about the complexities of a changing workforce, the urgency to neutralize serious injuries and fatalities (SIFs), the rapid rise of digital tools, and the growing importance of worker well-being. We didn't just listen to record these challenges; we listened to prepare for action.

The 2026 Corporate Listening Tour report represents a pivotal shift in our journey. We are moving beyond the "what" and "why" of workplace safety to the "how." Five critical themes emerged from this year's report to reflect a fundamental transformation: safety is no longer just a functional checkbox; it is a core business operating system.

As we look toward the horizon, we see a future where:

- **Workforce Stability is Safety and Health:** We address chronic skills gaps and rapid onboarding pressures as primary drivers of safety risk.
- **Safety and Health is a Value, Not a Metric:** We integrate safety into the very fabric of operational excellence and business strategy.
- **Technology Augments Humanity:** We embrace artificial intelligence (AI), automation and the implementation of technology through a lens of ethics, transparency and trust-based adoption.
- **Health is Infrastructure:** We treat overall worker well-being, including mental health and psychological safety, as foundational to a productive workplace.
- **Leadership is Relational:** We empower hybrid professionals who lead through influence and trust rather than authority alone.

The time for passive observation has passed. We are now in an era of empowered action. This report is a call to private and public sector leaders, EHS professionals, and workers alike to collaborate in building a safer, more resilient future. By turning these insights into integrated business strategies, we not only protect the workforce of today; we also champion the workforce of tomorrow.

Together, we are not just responding to the future; we are creating it.

Five Critical Themes in Workplace Safety

Five Critical Themes in Workplace EHS

Through our corporate listening efforts, we identified five interconnected themes that reflect a shift from EHS as a functional checkbox to a core business operating system.

01

Workforce Transformation and the “Stability Risk”

Chronic Skills Gaps
Rapid Onboarding Pressures
Promotion Readiness

02

The Digital Evolution: AI and Automation

Augmentation vs. Replacement
Governance and Ethics
Trust-Based Adoption

03

Strategic Integration: Beyond Compliance

Safety as a Value
Leading Indicators
Operational Excellence

04

Mental Health as a Foundational Infrastructure

Total Worker Health™
Psychological Safety
Capacity as a Control

05

The Governance Maturity Threshold

The Influential Leader
Relational Leadership

Each section explores how EHS professionals can connect their role to business outcomes and how leaders can drive meaningful change by prioritizing EHS. And because safety truly is a shared responsibility, we share insights on how workers can help their companies become true champions of EHS excellence.

01 Workforce Transformation and the “Stability Risk”

The labor market is no longer just a background condition; workforce instability is now a primary EHS risk.

1.1 Chronic Skills Gaps

Organizations are grappling with the loss of institutional knowledge and skills as experienced workers exit and less experienced workers enter high-risk environments. To protect workers in this fluid, constantly changing situation, leaders must adjust their expectations and rethink EHS systems and training models.

These systems must be redesigned to protect not only new apprentices and journeymen but seasoned workers as well. It is important not to allow risk normalization or familiarity to erode respect for hazards.

Impact on Business

The chronic skills gap brings less-experienced workers into working environments with high-risk hazards and exposures, increasing the need for training to create healthy, engaging work cultures, and for defensive barriers to avoid accidents. Businesses must also adapt to a new work culture in which attendance and commitment are viewed differently than by previous generations, challenging the stability of operational momentum.

Impact on EHS Professionals

The EHS profession must be ready to accept and train individuals who come into EHS from nontraditional career pathways, such as the skilled trades or operations.



There’s not a lot of us left in the business... the things I learned the hard way are still up here in my head, and I teach the younger professionals every day... they’re just not getting exposed to that because AI and other modern tools will do it for them.”

Chet Brandon, senior director,
Global EHS, Hexion



Questions Leaders Must Answer

Where can we find or how can we train individuals to fill the skills gap?

How do we prevent risk normalization and keep our workers safe?

How can we retain institutional knowledge and experience and transfer them to others?

Actionable Steps to Drive Change



Make EHS a core operating function.



Turn EHS training into a way to create a healthy, engaging work culture, rather than just a required procedure.



Develop a work culture that is in tune with the new generation's values.

Impact on Workers

Organizations are finding that highly experienced workers may struggle to adapt at the pace of technological change. At the same time, less experienced workers may adapt more easily to new technologies but often lack the technical and professional foundations needed. This dynamic creates complexity across the workforce.

What Workers Can Do

Speak up to identify skills gaps and training needs.

Pair more experienced workers with less experienced workers to create mentor/mentee relationships.

Be frank about the pros and cons of the work situation to help leaders improve recruiting and retention efforts.

1.2 Rapid Onboarding Pressures

High turnover and project-based work create a constant cycle of onboarding and training. New employees often take 12 to 18 months to reach the safety proficiency of a seasoned worker and may sometimes leave for better-paying roles.

Exacerbating this turnover are chronic labor shortages and skills gaps among the workers who are available. A reliance on temporary, contract and less experienced workers persists. There is a constant tension between the need for immediate productivity and the time required for safety and health onboarding.



Impact on Business

A business's workforce strategy is EHS strategy. Organizations that treat labor volatility as an operational reality, not a temporary disruption, perform better on safety and resilience.

Impact on EHS Professionals

Workforce instability is now a primary EHS risk, not a background condition. EHS systems, training models and leadership expectations are being redesigned to protect people in a fluid, constantly changing labor market. EHS professionals must embrace Total Worker Health™ concepts by monitoring and attending to safety and mental health and by addressing fatigue, financial stress and workload as operational risk factors.

Questions Leaders Must Answer

How do we train, engage and retain workers to reduce turnover?

How do we onboard new people quickly, effectively and safely?

How do we create a sustainable workforce, rather than being viewed as a "training plant"?

Actionable Steps to Drive Change



Make safety, health and well-being, as well as business, financial and leadership training, an integral part of frontline talent recruitment, retention and engagement strategy.



Expect and implement continuous upskilling and reskilling.



Partner with the HR team to make sure compensation is competitive and appropriately aligned.

Impact on Workers

Rapid onboarding amplifies risks and exposures already present and leads to injuries, illnesses, fatalities, environmental releases and significant property loss, particularly among untrained employees. The dynamic created by inexperienced workers melding into an aging workforce causes systemic EHS risks and elevated exposure to SIFs. Knowledge transfer, mentoring and safety IQ are eroding faster than traditional training can compensate. The workforce is still the primary constraint on safety performance.

What Workers Can Do

Be mindful of the challenges facing new people.

Provide feedback on upskilling and reskilling needs.

With the help of on-site trainers and learning labs, new employees can practice high-risk tasks, such as using an angle grinder, in safe spaces before performing them in the field.

1.3 Promotion Readiness

The industry faces a promotion before readiness challenge, particularly during periods of fast business growth. Many are promoted based on technical skills rather than leadership ability or maturity, leading to communication breakdowns and increased risk. Management's expectations and actual readiness are sometimes out of sync.

Impact on Business

Leaders are struggling with an experience gap in the workforce. In many manufacturing environments, individuals are promoted into leadership roles because of business growth rather than readiness, often struggling because they lack a background in EHS.

Impact on EHS Professionals

EHS professionals must make leadership development a priority, both by identifying workers with leadership potential and by providing leadership training.



Questions Leaders Must Answer

How do we attract and foster promotable talent and get them up to speed?

What is the career pathway to promotion for the worker?

Is the promotion aligned with the worker's values?



Actionable Steps to Drive Change



Identify individuals with strong leadership and technical skills potential early on.



Provide robust professional development for all workers, including leadership and technical training.



Create a workplace culture that attracts and retains strong leaders.

Impact on Workers

Workers will appreciate and be motivated by investments made in their professional development.

What Workers Can Do

Provide input into their professional development interests and needs.

Assist in the process of identifying individuals with strong leadership potential.

Demonstrate leadership and take on higher-level responsibilities.

02 The Digital Evolution: AI and Automation

Technology is moving from a trend to be watched to a tool to be operationalized, though significant gaps in maturity remain. The use of AI, analytics, wearables and digital planning tools is accelerating for hazard anticipation, predictive risk management and standardization across complex ecosystems. There is also concern about ethics, trust, privacy, misuse, wrong application and overreliance on these tools. Technology is becoming the connective tissue of the safety ecosystem but only when paired with clarity, standards and human accountability.

2.1 Augmentation vs. Replacement

A recurring theme is that AI and analytics must enhance human judgment rather than erode competence or vigilance. This theme mirrors the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)'s call for human-centered technology that augments, not replaces, judgment.

For example, AI can be used for predictive insights and visibility rather than for decision-making. Examples include using facial recognition in vehicles to detect driver fatigue and using drones to validate work quantities in high-risk areas like solar panel installations on ash ponds. In addition, AI can be used for predictive analytics to identify at-risk candidates during hiring and to predict driver retention while minimizing bias related to gender or age.

Impact on Business

AI enables professionals to work faster and handle more volume, but it also raises expectations of output that can lead to brain fatigue. Businesses must address concerns about the overreliance on data without human judgment by embedding standards and ethics into digital tools.

Impact on EHS Professionals

Technology is reshaping how work is done, but organizations are still learning how to ensure it enhances safety without eroding competence, vigilance or human judgment. As AI and other technologies are integrated in EHS, there must be a strong emphasis on keeping a human in the loop.

AI is still in its infancy. It will continue to grow. It will continue to be more and more part of our everyday operation. It will continue to take the burden of interpreting massive amounts of data off people. All that being said, the whole reason it works is it makes us better. The technology exists to make people's jobs and lives better and we got to stay focused on that."

Chet Brandon, senior director,
Global EHS, Hexion

Automation is adding a lot of complexity to our business and a lot of risks that we need to be able to manage. Automation is something that keeps me up at night, but it's also something that's made us safer."

Lisa Battino, vice president, Compliance and Safety,
United States Cold Storage

Questions Leaders Must Answer

Is the deployment of technology solving, enhancing or masking root problems?

How do we scale AI and other technologies responsibly while maintaining the human element?

Is the use of technology aligned with the business's vision and objectives?

Actionable Steps to Drive Change



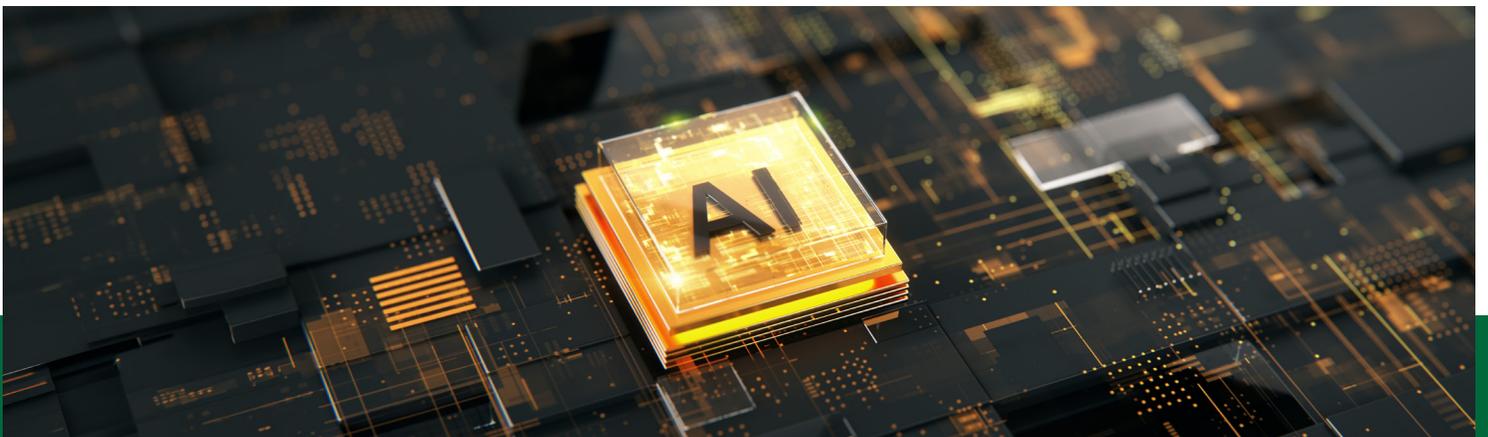
Implement human-in-the-loop verification systems to provide validation for critical decisions.



Train staff to critically analyze AI outputs.



Position AI as a support system rather than an authority.



Impact on Workers

Worker acceptance and validation are key to successfully implementing technology and AI to achieve safety goals. Technology must be designed to fit into work design and organizational systems, not to disrupt them.

What Workers Can Do

Become engaged in the rollout of wearables, robotics and other kinds of technology designed to improve safety.

Provide ongoing feedback on the effectiveness of the technology.

Provide feedback if automation or human-robot interaction increases complexity or unfamiliar risks.

2.2 Governance and Ethics

As digital tools become embedded within organizational systems, there is a growing need for clear standards, data quality and ethical guardrails. Otherwise, risk and exposure occur when digital tools advance faster than governance and ethical guidance. Governance is now framed as a determinant of EHS performance.

Impact on Business

Leaders must establish EHS within governance to help control risks posed by potential legislation, regulatory fragmentation and litigation, as well as to support a solid environmental, social and governance (ESG) framework.

There is explicit caution about governance now, as it is increasingly perceived and framed as a risk control. Over the years, governance has shifted from being a background context to being recognized as a determinant of EHS outcomes.

Impact on EHS Professionals

EHS credibility increases when safety is embedded into board-level governance and ESG conversations. This integration reinforces the move from compliance toward risk-based, systems-level prevention.

We have to be careful that we don't dive so far into technology that we take the human element out of it. We need to keep the human in the loop for the foreseeable future."

Julie Thyne, director,
Global Improvement, Dow, Inc.



I'll never be a doctor, and I'll never do all those things that doctors do to save lives. But I look at it like this: If I can write a procedure or change a policy and get that implemented, there is potential, over time, to possibly help save millions of lives."

Randall Armstrong, CSP, corporate ES&H advisor, Targa Resources

Questions **Leaders Must Answer**

Is the quality of our governance good enough to survive disruption?

Does our governance make innovation safe or fragile?

Is our governance structure and leadership behavior aligned and contributing to better EHS outcomes?



Actionable Steps to Drive Change



Embed governance into organizational systems, particularly those relating to AI, human-robot environments, integration challenges and noise vs. signal.



Establish cross-functional oversight of digital tools.



Implement digital literacy training, including ethical dilemma simulation.

Impact on Workers

Governance matters for decisions relating to the safety and health of workers, therefore applying to resource allocation, budgeting, incident reporting, accountability and more.

How Workers Can Help

Provide input into standards and ethical guidelines for digital tools.

Call attention to frontline safety issues created by new technologies.

Engage in dialogue about how to assure fair, transparent and human-centered technology.



2.3. Trust-Based Adoption

Technology only succeeds when paired with effective change management and frontline trust. Successful technology adoption requires a human-machine-human policy where humans input the data and validate the AI's output to ensure accuracy. Trust is essential to safety and health, and vice versa. Trust is the social currency that drives successful leadership.

"If there's one thing safety professionals trust, it's each other."

Mike Quashne, senior manager, Health, Safety, Security and Environmental, Luminace

Impact on Business

Data is the currency, but trust is the constraint. Data is flowing more freely than before, but humans must develop trust in it. With predictive analytics, companies are moving from paper-based checklists to mobile apps that feed real-time data into global dashboards, allowing for predictive analysis and targeted EHS campaigns based on observed at-risk behaviors.

Impact on EHS Professionals

Innovation is moving toward connected personal protective equipment (PPE) where sensors in hard hats and gloves measure force impact or track inventory via radio-frequency identification (RFID). A major barrier is the lack of interoperability. EHS professionals do not want 15 different apps for 15 different types of PPE; they need open platforms.

"For the team members that come to our jobsite, there's a trust that we all are going to work together in a respectful way and produce not only great outcomes but go home better. You have to earn that trust every day, so this is an infinite journey to always raise the bar and reach new heights. I'm proud about that."

Adam Jelen, president and CEO, Gilbane Building Company



Questions Leaders Must Answer

How can I engage workers in the process of verifying data and trusting technology?

What habits, practices, processes or human interactions will technology change?

How will we support employees if technology results in fear or frustration?

Actionable Steps to Drive Change



Develop policies on how to validate the accuracy of AI.



Foster the involvement of and continuous feedback from all affected workers.



Develop internal champions to drive peer-led adoption.

Impact on Workers

Workers will not use technology they don't trust.

How Workers Can Help

Participate in the technology implementation process.

Provide candid feedback.

Become early champions.



03 Strategic Integration: Beyond Compliance

The most successful organizations are moving away from reactive, rule-based safety toward proactive, systems-based management.

3.1 EHS Performance as a Value

Leading firms treat EHS performance as a core business function, like quality or productivity, rather than a compliance overlay. However, some organizations do not provide the ability or resources commensurate with treating EHS as a valued function. A shift is occurring from catching people doing things wrong to catching them doing things right, using EHS conversations to model desired behaviors.

Impact on Business

Successful leaders view safety as a business risk that must be operationalized, not just a set of rules. Organizations must shift toward a systems-based approach, rather than just checking regulatory standards off a list.

Impact on EHS Professionals

Leaders expect EHS professionals to speak the language of risk, value and growth. They must be adept at explaining the value of doing more about EHS performance, as well as the value of EHS certification(s). EHS is being moved upstream by embedding EHS leaders into technical and industrial performance (TIP) teams, so they are involved from the infancy of project planning rather than as a reactive measure.



Great health and safety is not just coming home the way you came, it's about coming home better... that you've grown together, you've done something that's behind the bricks and mortar."

Adam Jelen, president and CEO,
Gilbane Building Company



"I want to keep accidents from happening in the first place. But some businesses are resigned to the fact that accidents are going to happen, and they don't want to put the effort into preventing them."

Ken Bogdan, partner and director, Risk Control Services,
Conner Strong & Buckelew

“We don’t treat safety as an incident response; we treat it as incident elimination. . . Raising the overall safety IQ of the field is very important to me.”

Jeremy Long, executive director, Prime Steel

Questions Leaders Must Answer

How do I operationalize EHS performance as a culture rather than only a compliance necessity?

How do I identify and quantify forces that could potentially cause harm or damage?

What is my company’s EHS narrative?

Actionable Steps to Drive Change



Create a narrative and business plan that explains the value of doing more about EHS.



Collect and compile data in support of the plan.



Recognize and reinforce people who you catch doing things right.

Impact on Workers

Working within a culture that considers safety as a core value, workers will be safer and more productive.

What Workers Can Do

Report potentially harmful situations.

Demonstrate how safety procedures improve productivity.

Participate in the process of EHS certification(s).

3.2 Leading Indicators and the Evolution of EHS Metrics and Measurements

There is a definitive shift from tracking lagging injury rates to using predictive, decision-grade metrics to drive business strategy. By turning data into insights, leading indicators are a proactive way to spot the causes of improvements or declines, not only relating to EHS performance, but to virtually any aspect of a business.

Leading indicator programs can track measures such as executive EHS leadership activities, news coverage and high-profile site visits. Top firms have inverted their reporting structures from lagging to leading.

Impact on Business

Transitioning from reacting to lagging indicators toward proactively acting upon leading indicators can improve workforce safety, health, environmental stewardship, belonging and trust.

Impact on EHS Professionals

Organizations want foresight, not lagging reports. Keeping EHS relevant and top of mind for senior management, enhanced metric tools — including leading indicators — can help demonstrate a direct relationship between incidents and factors such as stress, fatigue, mental health and burnout. Compliance is necessary, but leading indicators can better protect workers and the business.



My work family members now are critical thinkers, from the laborers through the experienced craft professionals. And I appreciate that because it challenges me to stay in tune with the latest and greatest when it comes to human performance, leading indicators, mental health and emotional intelligence."

Britt Howard, vice president,
Health, Safety and Environment,
Worley



Questions Leaders Must Answer

What am I doing to encourage the transition from lagging to leading indicators?

What kinds of metrics and measurement should we track to help reach our goals?

What common and effective indicators are used in our industry?

Actionable Steps to Drive Change



Identify the key indicators that directly influence desired outcomes.



Adopt scorecards for leading indicators, such as training performance, coaching effectiveness, executive EHS engagement or others.



Change from “we need leading indicators” to actively benchmarking and modeling them.

Impact on Workers

The use of leading indicators can demonstrate a relationship between incidents and stress, fatigue, mental health and burnout.

What Workers Can Do

Report near misses.

Participate in safety audiences.

Provide honest feedback relating to stress, fatigue, mental health and burnout.

3.3 Operational Excellence

Investment in EHS is increasingly linked to business sustainability, reputation and the ability to attract and retain top talent. Therefore, risks to safety such as burnout, fatigue and stress are viewed as operational risk factors.



Impact on Business

EHS performance is increasingly treated as an operational discipline rather than just a compliance overlay, with a focus on learning from normal work with a structured approach to proactive EHS performance rather than just investigating when things go wrong.

Impact on EHS Professionals

EHS professionals must view EHS as an operational discipline and adopt the same rigor applied to any other operational function.



We embed safety as an operational discipline rather than just a compliance function. Before, safety lived in policies, audits, programs, forms and more. But as I look back, the biggest progress is when we have line leadership own safety and integrate that into work planning, whether it be an outage execution or daily decision-making, and to understand how to implement programs and policies that allow people to be more forward-thinking and plan for safety."

Jayme Hobson,
general manager, Demolition,
Tennessee Valley Authority



I'm always a safety professional, but now I'm in more of an operational role. It's important and powerful when operational excellence and worker protection are treated as the same objective. That alignment has helped us drive down injuries altogether."

Jayme Hobson, general manager, Demolition, Tennessee Valley Authority

Questions Leaders Must Answer

How do we define and measure operational excellence outside of required regulatory requirements?

What is currently hindering our efforts to reach operational excellence?

How can we foster continuous improvement?

Actionable Steps to Drive Change



Overall EHS performance and well-being must be integrated into operational and business systems and framed as operational resilience, not just a program.



Define clear objectives and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) relating to EHS improvement.



Leverage technology to help meet objectives and KPIs.

Impact on Workers

When operational excellence and worker safety and health are merged toward meeting a common objective, workers will become more productive, safer and healthier.

What Workers Can Do

Identify how risks to safety and health, such as burnout, fatigue and stress, are affecting them on the job.

Offer ideas on ways to manage these risks and exposures to improve operational excellence and safety.

Use dashboards to analyze performance, compare against benchmarks and identify areas needing improvement or enhancement.



04 Mental Health as Foundational Infrastructure

Worker well-being has transitioned from an HR-adjacent topic to a critical safety and health control. Mental health is now embedded into the safety and health infrastructure.

4.1 Total Worker Health™

Stress, fatigue and burnout are now framed as direct safety risks linked to workplace incidents. By adopting the idea of Total Worker Health™, organizations recognize that outside stressors and mental health directly impact focus and safety-critical aspects of a job. Well-being is no longer supportive, it's foundational to safe work.

Impact on Business

Leading organizations link safety and health to Maslow's hierarchy, recognizing that if a worker's basic needs (food and security) are not met, they cannot be expected to prioritize high-level safety behaviors. In addition, organizations recognize that external stressors, such as immigration status uncertainty for family members or related protests, impact an employee's on-the-job safety, health and mental well-being. Worker well-being is inseparable from operational risk management in high-change environments.

Impact on EHS Professionals

EHS professionals must design health and safety initiatives that are consistent globally but also match the local culture. Multinational firms sometimes struggle to scale initiatives (like positive reinforcement) in regions where the culture is traditionally more critical or negatively focused. In addition, there is a critical need for nomenclature unification, or a common vernacular, across the industry. Workers traveling between jobsites often encounter different terms for the same hazards, which leads to confusion and risk.



Construction workers face challenges that a lot of people don't necessarily understand, and they don't have the vehicle to talk about it. I worked in the business for a long time, and I know that you don't talk about your feelings in construction, you just don't. You turn to a bottle, you turn to something else, or you turn to something very dark, and this is why we have a lot of problems. I like the fact that we're beginning to focus on that as an actual safety topic, because it's probably more important than anything else that we do."

Ken Bogdan, partner and director,
Risk Control Services, Conner Strong
& Buckelew

Questions Leaders Must Answer

Am I doing enough to influence and enable Total Worker Health™?

Is my workplace fully human-centered?

Do our EHS initiatives sync with the local culture?

It's up to us as leaders to make it a priority to get to know our work family members as individuals. For example, when Britt didn't say he was 'fantastic' today, I know to check in on him to ask what's going on because he always says he's fantastic. Having that knowledge base, that connection and that authentic sharing of 'I'm interested in how you're doing — is there anything that I can do to help you?' is important and taken seriously."

Britt Howard, vice president, Health, Safety and Environment, Worley

Actionable Steps to Drive Change



Give your workers trust, permission and capacity to attend to their safety and health.



Provide a safe and healthy environment for workers to speak up under pressure or uncertainty with concerns, issues, ideas and enhancements, without fear of reprisal.



Learn about outside stressors that may be affecting your workforce.

Impact on Workers

Whole-worker support can address various aspects of Total Worker Health™, such as immigration-related stress, financial unpredictability and workplace violence. The emerging, integrated culture makes it acceptable to ask for help and to have open conversations. Peer-to-peer and system-based mental health models are gaining traction.

What Workers Can Do

Assist in creating programs and venues that enable workers to speak up about their concerns.

Report EHS hazards.

Engage in wellness programs.

4.2 Psychological Safety

Psychological safety is defined as the worker's belief that EHS systems are there to protect them, allowing them to speak up about hazards, such as confined space entry concerns, without fear of retaliation or stigma. Toward the goal of achieving Total Worker Health™, organizations are increasingly addressing psychosocial risks by putting systems in place to prevent harassment and ensure respect alongside physical safety and health.

Impact on Business

Organizations are moving toward a safety and healthy culture where the focus is on work as perceived versus work as done, ensuring employees feel comfortable reporting hazards without fear of blame.

Impact on EHS Professionals

Leaders are integrating psychosocial safety into key initiatives, recognizing its impact even when mental health claims are not yet compensable in most workers' comp systems.



Psychosocial safety is having the systems in place. It is the actual belief that these systems are here to support me, to serve me, to protect me."

Britt Howard, vice president,
Health, Safety and Environment,
Worley



The most sophisticated safety system in the world cannot compensate for a leader who isn't paying attention to their people. Fatigue isn't just a physical state — it's a signal. And empathy isn't a soft skill. It's a leadership discipline that saves lives."

Jay Harf, PhD, CSP, CPEA, CSHM, vice president,
Global EHS, Xylem



Questions Leaders Must Answer

Do I have systems in place to assure psychological safety and an accountable culture?

Does my workplace reduce or amplify anxiety? Build or degrade trust? Remove or place barriers in front of performance?

How can I create open forums in which it's safe to share views, concerns and ideas?

Actionable Steps to Drive Change



Create environments where coaching replaces correction, reducing worker anxiety, building trust and improving performance. Reframe failures as learning opportunities.



Actively invite diverse perspectives.



Promote inclusivity and give equitable value to all voices.

Impact on Workers

Psychological safety determines whether workers speak up, pause work or hide jobsite risks and exposures. Workers must feel safe and empowered to speak up, report hazards or pause work without fear of stigma or retaliation.

What Workers Can Do

Speak up about hazards, including if one of those hazards is the fear of retaliation or stigma.

Report instances of harassment or lack of respect.

Admit mistakes and miscues in the spirit of promoting a learning culture.

4.3 Capacity as a Control

Organizations are beginning to view worker capacity such as cognitive load and financial predictability as a key part of risk management. Capacity, measured through time, staffing and cognitive load, is increasingly framed as a control — the management of workers, equipment, time and other resources to match production output with demand while maximizing efficiency and minimizing waste.

Impact on Business

The pace of change and the volume of work are identified as direct risks. Due to physical and psychological fatigue, workers are under pressure. Additionally, external stressors from regulations, tariffs, labor and other business issues can tax the capacity of leadership and governance systems. These stressors expose capacity gaps that can lead to safety failures.

Impact on EHS Professionals

Leaders are recognizing that financial stability and belonging are direct contributors to worker safety and health. For example, stacking work assignments to provide longevity for contractors can reduce stress and suicidal thoughts in construction.



To meet a price, safety sometimes gets cut out of the budget, and this is why Prime Steel does not take every job. This year our goal is to take less work, which sounds crazy as a business owner to say, but we're taking less work and we're going to do it better and we're going to give the owners a better product. Every job that I take is going to have the safety built in. It's non-negotiable. It's going to have the correct amount of workforce."

Jeremy Long, executive director,
Prime Steel



Controls. Everything is about controls. And when I say controls in our world, it's capacity. How are we getting controls in place? How are we defining controls? What is the definition of control? What makes it adequate? And then (what is) the measurement of the presence of that control? (We must ensure) that controls are in place when high energy is present. That's where we got to get to and it's hard work."

Matthew Compher, senior vice president, Safety, Health and Environmental,
Quanta Services

“As well as being known as the technical capacity of an organization, we need to be known as the business lever within an organization. I taught and I built capacity and safety around the world for a long time, but I had a president that knew that if we could get good in safety — quality, production and maintenance — then all those other things would get better.”

Scott Gaddis, vice president, Safety and Health, Intelx Technologies

Questions Leaders Must Answer

In my pursuit of optimized production, do I have the capacity for overall well-being, including mental health, in my workplace?

To achieve resilience, do I have the capacity for change and disruption in my workplace?

How can we identify and remove obstacles to improve efficient and effective production?

Actionable Steps to Drive Change



Avoid micromanaging and empower your workers by establishing documented processes and a culture of trust.



Define clear goals.



Train and upskill workers.

Impact on Workers

Capacity as a control can help workers balance operational demands with their well-being.

What Workers Can Do

Participate in cross-training to meet demand and prevent bottlenecks.

Provide feedback on workload.

05 The Professional Maturity Threshold

Safety and health systems often advance faster than the professional maturity needed to lead them.

5.1 The Influential Leader

EHS leaders are now expected to be system integrators and business partners who can translate safety and health data into the language of risk and ROI.

Impact on Business

EHS professionals now need hybrid skill sets: technical + data literacy + storytelling + influence.

Impact on EHS Professionals

EHS leaders continue to evolve into business functions with high operational acumen. They are expected to participate in bid proposals and financial meetings to understand how EHS impacts the bottom line.



Questions Leaders Must Answer

How can we use EHS data to make smarter business decisions?

Will a proactive EHS approach improve ROI?

What technical and professional competencies are critical for EHS leaders?

Actionable Steps to Drive Change



Pursue training in operations, finance, technology and data analytics, as well as EHS certifications.



Cultivate communication skills.



Develop business acumen.

Impact on Workers

An EHS professional can transform safety from a compliance checklist into an environment where workers can thrive safely.

What Workers Can Do

Provide hands-on operational knowledge.

Engage in open communication.

Foster collaboration around EHS performance.



5.2 Relational Leadership

Effective EHS leadership in a volatile world is relational and adaptive, requiring leaders to influence without direct authority.

Impact on Business

Leadership capability is the universal enabler. An influential leader holds knowledge and expertise, whether the topic is AI confusion, workforce instability, mental health normalization, leading indicators or contractor pressure and scheduling.

Impact on EHS Professionals

Senior leaders are concerned about the leadership readiness of the next generation and are creating internal EHS development programs to build a pipeline of talent from within other business disciplines. Modern EHS roles are defined as positions of influence rather than authority. Professionals must sell safety to business units and align it with profit and loss objectives. EHS professionals must translate EHS data into business language that resonates with executives and boards of directors.



Our whole company, Tesla, is very much a relationship-based company. It's not a hierarchy-based company. Because of that, my team is better at influencing and they're integrated into the business and talk to leaders regularly. We can't be afraid to let our teams integrate with senior leaders. If you don't build a relationship, you're never going to get anywhere,"

Laurie Shelby, vice president, EHSS, Tesla, Inc.



"If my boss isn't looking at it, I'm not looking at it. What gets measured gets managed."

Scott Luedke, vice president, Global Safety, Duravant

Questions Leaders Must Answer

Do I lead more by influence or authority?

Is my style control- or relationship-oriented? How can I shift it to gain trust?

Do I have a sufficient pipeline of talent to sustain safety within my organization?

Actionable Steps to Drive Change



Expand EHS's influence within the organization.



Create a pipeline of EHS talent.



Move from command-and-control toward trust, collaboration and mutual respect.

Impact on Workers

Workers will comply more readily with safety and health interventions through influence rather than through orders alone.

What Workers Can Do

Provide feedback on what influenced them to comply with safety and health regulations.

Participate in cross-team collaborations.

Promote inclusivity to help build a supportive and trusting environment.

Conclusion: From Listening to Leadership

The insights gathered throughout this year's Corporate Listening Tour report reveal a clear truth: workplace EHS performance is undergoing a fundamental transformation. The forces reshaping the modern workplace are redefining what it means to protect people at work.

Leaders across the country agree that EHS can no longer operate as a standalone program or mere compliance function. Instead, it must be integrated into the core systems that drive business performance. Tomorrow's model of workplace EHS performance is systemic, data-informed and human-centered.

Yet transformation will ultimately be driven by the people. Executives must embed safety and health into strategy and governance. EHS professionals must evolve as influential business partners and system integrators. Workers must remain active participants in shaping physically and psychologically safe, healthy and resilient workplaces. At its heart, safety has always been about people.

Together, we can connect people, technology and operations into a unified system. To achieve this, ASSP is removing barriers to effective action by addressing the primary drivers of SIFs. Additionally, we are launching standards-based user groups (SBUGs) — a new strategic framework designed to move the EHS profession beyond regulatory compliance toward measurable, data-driven excellence.

The SBUGs will create collaborative networks where practitioners, innovators and employers co-develop and operationalize EHS standards. They also will provide a feedback loop, translating complex consensus requirements into repeatable, scalable business systems and facilitating knowledge-sharing to reflect industry best practices and benchmarking. Three SBUGs are launching in 2026, each focused on a critical SIF: falls from heights, lockout/tagout and AI.

As we move forward to integrate best practices and safety-driven solutions through these initiatives, we invite you to engage with us. Your experiences and perspectives from the field are invaluable as we work together to build the future of EHS excellence.



References to specific companies, products, services or technologies are meant for informational purposes only and do not constitute an endorsement or recommendation by ASSP. Any opinions, advice or statements expressed are those of the respective contributor(s) and not of ASSP. Neither ASSP nor any third-party provider of information guarantees the accuracy, completeness or usefulness of the content.





AMERICAN SOCIETY OF
SAFETY PROFESSIONALS

Working together for a safer, stronger future.®