Scott Fowler

Hello, everyone, and welcome to the Case for Safety Podcast. I'm your host, Scott Fowler. I appreciate you being with us today. really excited for today's episode where we're going to be exploring a new report from ASSP about AI use in EHS, how professionals are using it, what's driving adoption, barriers they're encountering, and a whole lot more.

And joining us to discuss this report, what we learned and what it means for ASSP and the EHS profession moving forward, I am very pleased and honored to welcome to welcome ASSP president Monique Parker. Monique, welcome, thank you so much for coming on the show.

Monique Parker

Thanks so much for having me. I'm very excited to be here with you today.

Scott Fowler

Excited for the conversation. And I mentioned there at the top this report. It's called Trust, Ethics and Governance, How Safety Leaders Are Thinking About and Using AI. And it can be found at ASSP.org. And we'll include a link with this episode for everyone to go take a look. But to kind of start things off, I thought we kind of give folks, you know, an overview of you know how this report came about, the research that was involved with in it, you know, and you know what we were hoping to learn from the EHS community.

Monique Parker

Well, first and foremost, AI is changing so fast and rapid and there's so many different things going on. And we're learning it real time. I mean, you know, a lot of times in our profession there's regulation, so you have time to prepare, you kind of know what to expect. But here it's just hitting us straightforward, and we have to adapt as it's coming. And as soon as you think you understand it, you have no clue what you're doing. And so that's one of the exciting things about AI and what it's doing for us.

This is ASSP's first comprehensive industry-wide study when regards to AI and its role in EHS. We did a survey of over a thousand safety professionals from July 6th through August 7th and really wanted to understand how practitioners are using it, what benefit they're gaining from it, you know, some of the roadblocks that they're having, some of the great outcomes that they're coming up with. And because it was our first time aggregating all this data, we wanted to make sure that we got a good comprehensive view from a broad spectrum of various levels, various companies, and it really showcased a lot of good information that helps us continue to learn, grow, and adapt how we operate.

Scott Fowler

You mentioned there about, you know, get getting a cross-section of different, you know, different industries, different organizations, you know, and everybody's at it at a different at a different phase of this journey. So I wonder if we could spend a little time talking about, you know, what we learned about that AI EHS adoption journey and you know where different organizations are at, you know, in in their adoption of these tools.

Monique Parker

Well, let me just be honest and say, I am a late adopter, personally. it was hard for me to get my hands around it. There was a lot of misunderstanding. I didn't have a lot of knowledge background. And so I'm a late adopter. But when we were doing the survey, we found that the spectrum is so broad and it's all over the place, which is great because there were people that wanted to be in the forefront and there were others like me that needed a little bit more time to figure things out. but what we know it's not a single step, it's not a one-time, you find it.

You figure it out and you go in, and the journey is, you know, just easy to navigate. The survey found that most organizations they're really exploring and implementing AI in a lot of different ways. 87% of the respondents are in the exploratory phase where they're really just trying to get their feet wet, understand, and navigate through what that means and how they're going to use it.

Okay. And so, 66% of the 85% that are in the exploration phase are really just started in the last 18 months. So, they're just getting their feet wet on understanding. Organizations that have not already started in the AI journey, what we know from them is that they already feel like they're behind. They feel like they're trying to catch up constantly. And as we talked about before, that catch up is really where a lot of us are because as soon as we start, we're almost already behind.

But there were three strong predictors of AI adoption. The first and foremost was organizational culture. A lot of organizations are using AI to figure out how to navigate. They have a whole bunch of data that tells them a lot of different things. And they really want to integrate AI into how they how they speak about safety, how they integrate safety, what it means for their organization and for their employees.

And so what we see there is 77% of the professionals at integrated organizations, compared with 29% in the discovery phase, all of them are just all over the place. So I'm throwing out a lot of numbers. And if you read the report, it'll make a lot more sense than me just saying numbers and percentages. But one of the things that it really says is organizational culture is a really a big part of how people are using AI. The second predictor

that we saw is ethical concerns. And this is one of the challenges that I personally have throughout that. How do organizations ethically use AI where it's having meaningful information that is giving them the trusted advisor lens of the facts and the data and it's not just pulling from some theory or concept that somebody wrote a paper about.

So, I think it's all about where you're getting the information, what's the background, and how much that's vetted. And that goes along with the third point, which is data quality. Understanding that sore course of information when you pull your AI data, having good references and dialogues, all of those are critical. And that's what we've seen along the AI journey of where people are, how they're trying to build that trust and relationship with it, and how they want it to really impact their organization.

Scott Fowler

Let's talk a little bit more about that. You touched on it there, but as we mentioned, you know, organizations are at all different phases of this. Some are, you know, early adopters, some, you know, kind of, as you mentioned, getting their feet wet, you just trying to trying to figure things out. So, you know, for those organizations that are kind of at the forefront of this, you know, what you kind of made them, you know, more ready to implement this. And for those who are, you know, kind of maybe further behind, what barriers are they encountering to implementing these tools?

Monique Parker

What we found is nearly three-quarters of our respondents, what they experienced is low resource investment. So just understanding, like I said, the resource, the background, and not only the background of the data, but the resources that they've put into using AI, what their workforce looked like. Data quality is definitely going to be top of that list of barriers that they found, making sure they have the right data to give them the right information. Lack of ownership, champions, or organizational priority.

So a lot of times, regardless of what industry you're in, there are always gonna be challenges of where are we spending our time, money, and effort. And so that's the study really shows that that lack of ownership. Who's really gonna own this? Is this gonna be owned by safety? Is this gonna be owned by corporate? You know, at the site? Where does it sit and where is does it best sit?

Mistrust was another barrier. And again, that's part of where my hesitancy is do I really trust this? and then last, and I think, you know, when it comes to safety and organizational is that data security, that privacy, you know, how, if I give them all of my information, who else is gonna have access to it? And so all of those are things that we saw through the study that were barriers or concerns as the organizations that were e even adopting, but those that

were kind of slow, not adopting, those were the things that they were trying to navigate and truly understand in advance of just jumping in both feet forward and you know trying to fix figure it out from there.

Scott Fowler

Switching gears, we talked about this a little bit at the top, but I mean AI has, you know, so many potential uses in in the in the world of EHS for you know, hazard identification, other things. But when it comes to the report, you know, what did we find about what did we find out about, you know, what's really driving adoption and how organizations are, you know, are using this technology to improve safety and health.

Monique Parker

Now, I mean, I have to be honest. First and foremost, the first time you go into AI, it's not going to solve all the answers. It's not going to be the one-stop shop, and everything you need and all the problems or questions you've ever had are resolved and solved. But there are some ways to get some quick wins when you emerge and engage in it. But more complex applications of AI, such as predicting and responding to risk, is not widely achieved until you really get to full integration.

So that's one of the things is I don't want anybody to think if you start using AI, all your questions that you ever had are miraculously going to be solved and answered, but it's going to take time, effort, and energy. And so some of the things that we saw through the report is limited adoption, real-time monitoring and alerts. That's when those that are starting out early, that's where they're using AI, and that we saw that about 49%. And through the early level adoption, we see report development.

Now, I like doing some report development with AI because there's a lot of things that you've seen that you know that you want to pull together. And sometimes it's easier just to AI hey, these are all the amazing pieces of the puzzle I'd like to have in one place. Can you help me do that? The report showed us that AI can be a great source of report development, education, and training development. And so there's a lot of value there. And again, all of this came from the survey and the report that we were able to generate.

And then those that are really adopting it and are at the more advanced level, incident analysis and pattern recognition. 70% of those, you know, I'm all invested in this. 70% say that's where they're putting most of their energy. And when you have, when you do good root cause analysis and you can ask AI to summarize all these things for you, there's a great value in that. But then you can also challenge it to say, well, what about this, that, and the other?

And so you can have good dialogue with AI that helps you make sure you're asking the right question and at the analysis, appropriate automated compliance. There's a lot of pieces of the puzzle that advanced adopters are using that for as well. And then the other two that we see are resource optimization and predictive analytics and predictive resource management.

So that's where we saw, you know, the range of where people are, all the way from limited adoption where they're just looking at real-time monitoring and alerts, all the way to those that are highly integrated and immersing in it fully, the incident analysis. The automated compliance, those are the areas where we saw high use and where they're using it.

Scott Fowler

I'm curious, you mentioned for the reporting and things like that. I wonder if you could talk about more like you're your personal experience and y your experience within your organization of using these kinds of tools.

Monique Parker

From a standpoint of my background when it comes to safety, when I first started 5W, Taproot, a lot of different, different softwares and systems that we were using fishbone to try to do figure out root cause analysis. And those are still great tools by all means. There's no way AI is going to take away from that. But the thing that I think AI helps us with is if we have a good starting point of how we do data analysis or innocent incident analysis, AI can challenge us and we can challenge it.

And so it's like having 20 EHS professionals in one room talking about an incident and you're getting different insights. That's where we see the value and how we utilize it is really just kind of challenging our own opinions and views based on the data we have in front of us and also making sure we had don't have blind spots that we're not seeing because we're not able to get out of our way because we're in a very unique situation. So that's how we're using it. And I love the fact that it does challenge.

And then you can have you can the most ironic part, and some people don't even think about it, is you can actually have a conversation with AI and figure out where are the missing pieces. And to me, that's a game changer.

Scott Fowler

Absolutely. Wha when you think it you know, taking a look at their report yourself, was there anything that that that surprised you that you weren't expecting to hear from the field? And what were your, you know, big takeaways from the data that we gathered?

Monique Parker

Again, because I'm a later doctor, from the report, I started thinking about what are the ways that I am I missing that I can be using AI. And so when it was talking about doing some predictive analysis and those types of things, I had never thought about how can I, from a safety lens, give it information that is at my doorstep all the time and help use it to help me figure out where's the next opportunity, where's the next risk.

And so that was something that I really learned from the report is just looking at other ways people are using it, how I can integrate that into our operations at the company I work for, and what that could do for us long term in our use and development of the tool.

Scott Fowler

When you think kind of taking the next step from this report, thinking about the future and where all this is going, you know, where do you see, you know, this fitting into, you know, the conversation about building, you know, AIH AI literacy in NEHS and what you know, what does this mean for, you know, ASSP and the profession moving forward?

Monique Parker

Again, I go back to the foundation of being a trusted advisor and having the good information behind what we're doing and what that looks like. And so, I see us as an association being responsible and helping our members and other safety professionals figure out the responsible and ethical way to use AI so that it can be an enhancement. during our opening keynote at Safety 26.

The speaker was talking about how AI should be you should use it like an intern where you're not telling it to do things for you, but you're asking it to learn from you and then enhance some of the things you're doing. And for us, that to me is the thing is focusing on understanding, evaluating, and how we responsibly use AI.

One of the big things that ASSP is doing, we have our standard-based user groups, and AI is one of those focal points. And having that diverse unit together talking about how they're using AI, what are some of the current concerns that are out there? Again, this report is feeding into the SBUGs so that we can start having those conversations openly and honestly. And then figuring out what's next. Technology has to be designed to fit the work that we're doing and what that looks like and how we're doing it.

And so it's our goal to merge technology, the outcomes that we need, and figure out what is the best way for us to get all of that in one easy place. So and I think the last piece of how we use it and how we adopt it is acceptance. When you have people like me that are like, hold up, let's wait a minute. And you have others who are ready to go gung ho, let's do it

tomorrow. You know, getting everybody to the same place of acceptance, I think is something that we need to think about how we do that, what that looks like.

But in order to make people feel comfortable, they need to have data. They need to understand. And a lot of times they need to have some guardrails around its use so that they feel comfortable that there's not going to be misuse of it. When I think about other ASSP resources that are out there outside of the SBUGs, obviously we have this report that's going to give a lot of good information about current use and current applications.

And hopefully it'll help others like myself figure out safe ways to use it or acceptable or practice ways to be able to use AI in the profession. And then lastly, ASSP and UAB, University of Alabama at Birmingham, they have the applied AI for EHS certificate. I think, you know, if you're really questioning and want to figure out some things, it would be a great opportunity to engage in that program just so you can gain some knowledge and information and really understand the technology and science behind it and how it can be used in our per in our profession.

Scott Fowler

Sure. You mentioned the standards-based user groups there, the SBUGs, one of which is devoted to AI. For those out there who may not be f familiar with that program, what if you talk you know, talk a little bit more about that, you know, the you know, the goal of those groups and you know what they're trying to achieve.

Monique Parker

So everywhere I go, I love to talk about the SBUGs. So for those, let me repeat, standard-based user groups, I'll use SBUGs from now on. But the SBUGs to me are a game changer. When I was first coming into safety 20 years ago, if I had an S Bug group, I would have it would have to made my job 10 times easier.

Because what I was doing in the beginning was I was reading a standard, trying to go implement it into my workforce and figure out what that looks like. So with our SBUGs, we're able to take a standard, understand what the words of the standard say, and then transition it to how we're practically using it in different operations.

And those SBUG groups are people from diverse industries, diverse backgrounds, different levels, beginning to mid-range of their career in different phases, whether they're in operations, whether they're product manufacturer and the three SBUGs that we have are fall protection, lockout tag out, and AI.

And so when you can have real life conversations about what is the best way for me to lock this equipment out that you've been struggling with forever, you've got this wide range of

people that you can talk to, they may have experienced and can share best practices. And then at the end of the day, what we'd like to see is we'd like to see the information from these SBUGs go back to help us figure out if and what we may need to adapt in the standards when it comes to lockout, tag out, and fall protection. But then in AI, it's going to help us determine what does an AI standard look like?

And so the SBUGs, again, game changer. I'd love everybody to be part of the S-Bug so you can figure it out and understand. And we're using these three topics because we feel there's a direct connection to SIFS in regards to lockout, tag out, and fall protection. And then with the merging technology of AI, those were no-brainers.

As we get more comfortable and learn more about how we use S-Bugs, what they do, more topics will come available. But this is the beginning and this is why we started here and we'd love to get more engagement so we can therefore figure out how to continue to use this process.

Scott Fowler

Well said. And yeah, if folks out there are interested in learning more, they can visit ASSP.org/SBUGs. And Monique, I will give you the last word.

Monique Parker

Well, first and foremost, thank you for the opportunity to talk about the report that we did on AI. For those that are late adopters or a little hesitant to, you know, jump into the AI train and figure some things out, hopefully you can go into the report, understand how others within our profession are using it, gain some insight and experience from those that will help you feel more comfortable, more desirable to at least try just a little bit so that you can understand how it can help you.

Again, AI is, I'll just say, in my opinion, it's not going away. So we just need to figure out how we're going to integrate it, how we trust it, how we use it, and what that looks like in each one of our professions. Because there's not a one-way solution that's going to solve it for everybody, but there are pieces and elements of the tool that can enhance our jobs, that can make our jobs a little bit easier, and therefore give us an opportunity to really go from being reactive to proactive to being just about compliance to beyond compliance.

So I hope you learn, I hope you take the opportunity just to read the report. I hope it encourages you to at least try something. And if you have feedback for us or if you just want to have further conversations, I always love to connect. So please feel free to do so.

Scott Fowler

Yeah, I had the same thought as we're talking. This is not going away. This is something that, you know, EHS professionals need to think about, you know, how they can use these tools to, you know, help keep their team safe and healthy. And I really appreciate you coming on to share what this report had to say and how they can do that. So thank you so much again.

Monique Parker

Thank you, Scott, for the opportunity and have an amazing rest of your day.

Scott Fowler

You, too.