



# SAFEGUARDING YOUR ORGANIZATION LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE FIELD

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WHITE PAPER

# THE SAFETY CHALLENGE: NAVIGATING IN AN EVER-MORE-COMPLEX LANDSCAPE

For organizations in every industry and sector, workplace safety has arguably grown more crucial than ever. Consider:

- The world has become increasingly dangerous, with problems such as political unrest and destructive weather events presenting new perils.
- Competition among businesses has heated up, making it all too tempting for individuals and organizations to cut corners to gain an edge over rivals.
- Dwindling natural resources are forcing companies in some industries (such as energy) to operate under ever more dangerous conditions.
- Environmental, health, and safety (EHS) regulations have become more stringent and complex.
- With increased globalization, organizations have operations in far-flung places around the world, where safety standards and workplace conditions can differ widely.

## SPECIAL CHALLENGES FOR FAST-GROWING BUSINESSES

Fast-growing businesses are especially vulnerable to workplace hazards. Why? They typically launch huge hiring campaigns to bring in the talent they need to execute their strategies and support and sustain their growth. Employees new to the job tend to experience higher rates of injuries and illnesses than experienced workers do.

## NO EASY FEAT

Maintaining the safety of your employees and your business and mitigating the risks that can cause injury or damage constitute the core of any workplace safety program. But given the complexities characterizing today's business environment, determining which initiatives to put at the top of your priority list is no easy feat.

<sup>1</sup> "United States Department of Labor. (2021). Business Case for Safety and Health.

<sup>2</sup> "Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2021, December 16). National Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries in 2020.

**\$171  
BILLION**

Cost of work-related  
deaths and injuries  
in 2019<sup>1</sup>

**4,764**

Number of fatal work  
injuries recorded in the  
United States in 2020<sup>2</sup>

## IF ORGANIZATIONS MAKE A MISSTEP...

Organizations that fail to surmount safety challenges or that over-rely on limited-impact traditional approaches to safety and compliance can face a range of serious consequences, including:

- A painful human toll — from severe, life-changing injuries to loss of life.
- Decreased productivity when employees are injured and can't come to work.
- Financial impact of missed workdays for the organization.
- Damage to the organization's reputation, property, and customer relationships.
- Erosion of workforce morale.

**13**

Average number of workers who die each day on the job in 2020<sup>3</sup>

**\$1 BILLION**

Amount that disabling workplace injuries cost U.S. businesses per week<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Johnson Hess, A. (2121, December 29). 13 U.S. workers die on the job per day, on average — and these are the most dangerous jobs. CNBC.

<sup>4</sup> United States Department of Labor. (2021). Business Case for Safety and Health.

# THREE STEPS TO A SMARTER APPROACH TO SAFETY

If you're like most health and safety professionals, all this may be discouraging, and the challenges may seem insurmountable. But your organization can take steps to improve the effectiveness of its workplace safety programs. In fact, the most forward-thinking enterprises are already doing so — and they're garnering impressive results.

How are they managing it? Skillsoft's analysis of their efforts suggests that launching safety initiatives focused on these three areas can deliver immense value:

- **Sharpen your focus on risk and governance.** For instance, tailor your efforts around your organization's most pressing problem areas — such as serious incident and fatality rates, or vehicle accident rates and workers' compensation rates.
- **Improve your safety systems and standards.** To illustrate, deploy a new information management system or manage safety data sheets more effectively.
- **Build a culture of safety and compliance in your organization.** For example, provide EHS leadership training, and regularly conduct safety meetings and risk self-evaluations.

Let's take a closer look at each of these, and see examples of how progressive companies are successfully implementing such initiatives.



## SHARPENING YOUR FOCUS ON RISK AND GOVERNANCE

A multinational pharmaceuticals company decided to take a fresh look at the safety-related information it needed to monitor and how to use that data. Previously, the company had used a traditional benchmarking approach to risk and governance — one that focused on tracking lost-time incident (LTI) rates. The HR team had hypothesized that the more near-misses that were reported, the more LTIs could be prevented.

However, research showed that despite progress on the workplace safety front, serious incident and fatality (SIF) rates hadn't changed in the last 15 years. HR leaders realized that something they had assumed was a predictive model was not actually predictive, and decided to focus on SIF rates instead.

### SPOTLIGHT ON SIFS

Taking a different approach to managing SIF rates, the company introduced a new KPI — “potential SIFs” — into its risk and governance program. It then began analyzing all reported accidents and incidents, to see whether a relatively minor accident or incident could have turned into a SIF if conditions had changed. The business continually runs accident and incident data to identify potential SIFs and communicates findings to foster learning at each work site. Data are routinely rolled up to top managers at each site, and then to heads of operating units.

### EHS LEADERSHIP TRAINING

The company also launched an overall EHS leadership training program, delivered over a three-year timeline to reinforce the focus on SIF rates:

- **Year 1:** Deep knowledge. The program concentrated on strengthening leaders' knowledge of EHS regulations and priorities that the organization had defined — particularly the importance of reducing SIF rates. Trainers personalized the topic of safety for leaders by asking them to document one or two safety commitments they had made for themselves, such as ensuring that they could go home to their families every day after work.

This phase of the program also included study of cognitive biases in perceptions of job risk. For instance, training revealed that people who routinely perform highly dangerous jobs (like electrical linemen) may far underestimate the risks in their work because they've done it every day for a long time. As a result, they can get dangerously complacent about safety.



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- **Year 2:** New behaviors on the shop floor. Leaders learned to change their approach in promoting workplace safety, particularly while conducting EHS inspections or safety walks in their facilities. Leaders moved the emphasis of their conversations with equipment operators and other personnel from a discussion around risk topics to a focus on where those actual risks could occur. For instance, instead of merely asking about slips, trips, and falls during shop-floor conversations, leaders would focus on important factors contributing to SIF rates — such as flaws in shields and other devices covering hazardous areas of manufacturing equipment.

By demonstrating new behaviors and safety practices on the job, business leaders can provide real-time, tangible safety measures that inspire managers and employees to adopt new, safety-oriented behaviors themselves and encourage them to offer ideas for further enhancing safety at their locations. Indeed, EHS professionals within the company acknowledged that while they know what the regulations are and what the company must do to comply, people performing the actual work best know how the work is done and where the worst risks lie. Therefore, involving business leaders within the company continues to be an essential part in shaping safety culture.

- **Year 3:** Smarter decision-making. Leaders focused on making more informed EHS decisions, drawing on insights gained from their business operations and guidance from the company's EHS experts. As part of this effort, leaders learned how specific decisions and changes could contribute to the business's bottom line. For instance, safety-related decisions that lowered costs and/or boosted productivity in the workforce would translate directly into higher profitability for the company. This awareness further enhanced business leaders' sense of empowerment — their ability to make a positive impact on the whole organization, versus merely following safety mandates handed down from top management.

# IMPROVING YOUR SAFETY SYSTEMS AND STANDARDS

An international provider of alternate and specialty auto parts wanted to improve its safety systems and standards. Executives knew that implementing this initiative wouldn't be easy, given the complexity of the company's operations. The business had operations on multiple continents around the globe and a delivery fleet comprising many thousands of vehicles.

To enhance safety for its delivery-vehicle drivers, the company launched a series of initiatives focused on leveraging the power of technology.

## GPS AND ROAD MAPPING

The company equipped its delivery fleet with specialized software and hardware, and has begun using those technologies in innovative ways. GPS technology, for example, helps the company monitor where drivers are traveling and how fast they're going. But the company gathers far more than just this basic data. It uses the technology to conduct route mapping for predictive monitoring of hazards — analyzing delivery routes and the orders going out each day, and mapping the most efficient and safest routes for its drivers. It has also established rules for avoiding hazards and accidents along each route, such as “Try to avoid left-hand turns on this route.” Automatic braking systems on the delivery vehicles further help to prevent rear-end crashes.

## SAFETY DATA SHEETS

In another important move, the company has improved its management of safety data sheets. Its manufacturing plants have hazards on site that include dangerous chemicals and machines. Previously, the data sheets had been kept in file cabinets and updated by hand, then copied and mailed out to the company's multiple hundreds of locations. This was a time-consuming, difficult-to-maintain, and costly process, and it raised the risk that at least some data sheets would not be up to date.

To address this challenge, the company partnered with a data management service provider specializing in maintaining safety data sheets online. Employees now have access to the online site and can easily enter data whenever safety-related incidents occur. This improves the odds that the sheets are up-to-date, and makes it much easier to share the data across manufacturing sites to support learning and safety improvement.

## A NEW LMS

The company also implemented a new learning management system (LMS) aimed at assigning required safety training for each job title and location. The system has improved compliance considerably. At any given moment, fleet managers can access the system, learn about a safety training course and determine which drivers have successfully completed the course and who still needs to complete it.

The LMS supports onboarding of new hires, too. For many newcomers, much of their safety training must take place during their first few days on the job, and focuses on activities such as using forklifts, picking orders and preventing falls and other accidents or incidents. The system facilitates easy tracking of which new hires have completed which required training courses.



# BUILDING A CULTURE OF SAFETY AND COMPLIANCE IN YOUR ORGANIZATION

An international auto-parts supplier has taken a range of bold steps to foster a safety-minded culture throughout its workforce and managerial ranks.

## PERSONALIZED SAFETY AWARENESS

The company encourages employees to engage directly with safety initiatives, so they'll feel a stronger sense of ownership and will want to invest time and effort in safety training and related programs. For instance, managers explain how compliance with EHS regulations benefits not only the business but also employees personally — by enabling them to go home every day after work, healthy and strong, so they can take care of their families and manage other priorities in their personal lives.

## LOCAL SAFETY COMMITTEES

At each of the company's locations, volunteers from the workforce lead a local safety committee that meets monthly. During the meetings, members discuss safety issues most pertinent to them; for example, equipment that needs repair or process glitches that raise the possibility of injury on the job. Members also suggest new training that the company could provide to address the issues facing them.

Someone takes notes at every committee meeting, and sends them to the company's risk management department, which incorporates them into a centralized online repository. The department can then track the data and validate whether each location is following through on decisions made at the monthly meetings. Information in the repository can also be aggregated and then analyzed to identify trends unfolding across the organization, which can shed further light on new training that the company should deliver.

## RISK TOPIC OF THE MONTH

At the corporate level, the company's risk management department selects an EHS topic to focus on each month — such as heat stress, driving safety, or blood-borne pathogens. The department develops materials relevant to the topic and distributes it to the local safety committees. Members can incorporate the materials into their monthly discussions of local issues facing them.

## MANAGER SELF-EVALUATIONS

Every quarter, managers at the company's different locations complete a four-to five-page form, grading themselves on various aspects of safety and compliance performance. Risk management team members then conduct random visits to the different locations, auditing training programs and local safety committee meetings. The combination of the corporate-level monitoring from the risk management group and the information provided in the managers' self-evaluations provide checks and balances that help the company assess the degree to which information reported by the local operations reflects what's actually happening.

## CENTRALIZED EHS GUIDE

The company posts OSHA regulations in an EHS guide located on a SharePoint site, readily accessible to managers. In addition to the regulations themselves, the guide provides interpretations of the regulations, explaining how they apply to the company and what the company must do to comply with each requirement. The guide thus serves as a vital information source for seasoned managers facing new situations as well as newly minted managers. For instance, if one of the company's salvage yards receives a new front-end loader workers have never seen before, the guide provides information on what the company must do to safely use the equipment — including specific types of training required.

# CONCLUSION

The stories from the field that have been shared here point to some vital lessons that can benefit organizations in any sector and industry seeking to strengthen their EHS programs. In particular:

- **Leadership training.** Investing in leadership training is a must-have, not a nice-to-have. When modeling the right behaviors and attitudes, leaders who have participated in training set an example for everyone else in the organization and inspire change at every level.
- **Technology.** Leveraging technology can supercharge crucial components of any EHS program. This includes helping organizations to build a robust LMS and to gather the data necessary to identify better ways to meet their EHS priorities.
- **Adaptability.** Taking a flexible approach to compliance pays big dividends. For instance, being willing and able to set up new organizational structures such as safety committees at the shop-floor level, or to define new safety performance indicators can help organizations adapt to changes in the environment and surmount new challenges coming their way.

Skillsoft Compliance Solutions can help organizations create healthy and safe work environments that protect both employees and the business from risk. Through a full spectrum library of ethics, legal, and EHS online courses in multiple languages, Skillsoft helps employees at all levels of the organization understand the potential risks that exist within their work environment and recognize the critical hazards that can threaten their health and safety.

With an advanced LMS capable of handling complex training requirements (i.e. user defined groups, demographics, recurrences, etc.), Skillsoft provides organizations with an enterprise learning solution that offers access to compliance and safety training plus leadership, business, IT, and digital content. By streamlining the learning experience, Skillsoft can engage leadership beyond regulatory training requirements by offering additional learning opportunities to support personal career objectives.

To learn how Skillsoft's compliance solutions can support your organization's environmental, health, and safety initiatives, please visit [skillsoft.com/compliance-leaders](https://skillsoft.com/compliance-leaders).

[Talk to an expert](#) to learn more about how Skillsoft Compliance Solutions can help support your organization's safety initiatives.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

## NORMAN FORD

As VP of Compliance Products, Norman Ford has responsibility for the compliance product portfolio at Skillsoft. His role prior to joining Skillsoft was Vice President of eLearning Products and Services and co-founder of GoTrain Corp. Prior to GoTrain, Mr. Ford served as Manager of Technical Assistance and Qualification for Lockheed Martin Energy Systems, where he was responsible for the development of Lockheed Martin Energy Systems training requirements and procedures and provided corporate subject matter expertise in regulatory and compliance issues. Mr. Ford has over 30 years' experience in Conduct of Operations, Nuclear Operations, Training Drills, Qualification, Certification, Training Procedure and Technical Training issues while serving organizations including Lockheed Martin, the US Department of Energy, and the US Department of Defense (US Navy).



# ABOUT SKILLSOFT

Skillsoft (NYSE: SKIL) is a global leader in corporate digital learning, focused on transforming today's workforce for tomorrow's economy. The company provides enterprise learning solutions designed to prepare organizations for the future of work, overcome critical skill gaps, drive demonstrable behavior change, and unlock the potential in their people. Skillsoft offers a comprehensive suite of premium, original, and authorized partner content, including one of the broadest and deepest libraries of leadership & business skills, technology & developer, and compliance curricula. With access to a broad spectrum of learning options (including video, audio, books, bootcamps, live events, and practice labs), organizations can meaningfully increase learner engagement and retention. Skillsoft's offerings are delivered through Percipio®, its award-winning, AI-driven, immersive learning platform purpose built to make learning easier, more accessible, and more effective.

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