

## Top 2013 trends in workplace safety management



# White Paper

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## Introduction

For safety managers and directors, the year 2013 will hold a mix of continuing challenges and new opportunities. This report highlights four significant trends that will affect how safety managers do their jobs in the coming year. It also explores how managers can respond to these trends with the most safety-conscious solutions.

### 1. Coping with greater workloads

Much is demanded from safety managers. They must raise multitasking to an art form: simultaneously responding to upper management, inspiring employees, and ensuring compliance with regulators, while also performing a variety of recordkeeping, procuring safety products and other administrative duties.

For many managers, that heavy workload is likely to increase during the coming year. Global corporate consolidation and a rising tide of regulation will escalate responsibilities — while continuing economic difficulties can result in safety staff or budget reductions.

How are incident rates themselves affecting safety manager workloads? It varies by area and by the type of safety being considered.

In the fall protection category, where workers risk being injured or die from falls on the job, incident rates continue to increase worldwide. Savvy managers are stepping up their fall protection efforts. They're conducting internal audits of basics (ensuring that guardrails are at mandated heights, that protective equipment is compliant, etc.), improving training methods, and generally raising awareness and prevention efforts amongst workers.

In the hearing protection category, the numbers tell a more complicated story. In many Western countries, for example, worker compensation claims for job-related hearing losses are actually declining. However, studies show that the percentage of the workforce encountering noise-induced hearing loss remains relatively constant. Experts say it's simply that economic downturns lead to keeping fewer people employed, and thus fewer making claims. So continuing hearing conservation education and training efforts with workers still constitute an important priority for concerned safety managers.

In categories such as respiratory and vision protection, accident rates are generally holding steady, or slightly declining, in mature industrial cultures, where steady attention by safety professionals and improvements in personal protective equipment (PPE) technologies have paid off.

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Across multiple safety categories, managers are realizing the advantages of standardizing on one trusted brand of equipment for most or all of their safety needs. This can be particularly useful in areas such as fall protection, where, for example, the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) in the U.S. introduced more stringent standards for snap hook gate strength requirements for General Industry. So managers are increasingly looking for vendors that offer greater options of product categories and group them into a systematized standardization program.

In general, across many product categories, safety managers actively lower their stress levels by obtaining comfortable, well-fitting PPE for their workers. People most readily accept — and most consistently and productively use — trusted equipment that has the right fit, the highest level of comfort, and the best-looking design.

Some PPE vendors are developing capabilities that should further relieve safety managers' productivity-killing workloads. Taking on certain responsibilities for safety program management, the vendor would provide site hazard identification, program development, record-keeping, internal culture of safety promotions, complete training schemes, and other consultative services. Safety managers would be freed to focus more closely on working with upper management, overall strategizing, and other critical tasks.

## **2. Creating a culture of safety**

Perhaps the most significant workplace safety trend of the year, if not the decade, is the increasing acceptance by safety managers in multiple industries of the concept of a culture of safety. These managers are leading their people to safety by inspiring workers to change behaviors and make safer choices on their own. A recent survey<sup>1</sup> identifies several common steps to achieve these ends.

One major effort: involving more employees in safety activities. Ideally, all workers are systematically trained — and consistently reminded — so that they understand the ramifications of wearing or correctly using their safety equipment, acting properly to ensure their own protection, and looking out for the safety of their co-workers.

Related to this is an ever-growing emphasis on behavior-based initiatives. For instance, industries such as construction favor the “buddy system” approach, wherein assigned pairs of employees are responsible for each other's PPE fit checks, proper use, and so on. Another innovative program also takes advantage of peer-to-peer bonding. Eye2Eye is a Web-based eye safety education and training program developed by Prevent Blindness America, the leading U.S. eye health and safety organization, in partnership with Honeywell Safety Products, the leading maker of safety eyewear. The program helps safety directors build a network of Safety Ambassadors — respected employees, who are given added vision protection training, then spread the word among their peers. This saves time and effort for the safety manager, and has proven effective at making safety part of each employee's day-to-day behavior.

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Another popular initiative to help foster employee safety consciousness utilizes peer meetings or “toolbox talks.” Here the safety manager attends meetings routinely held in many organizations at the start of a shift. He or she takes the opportunity to brief the team on topics such as newly available safety equipment, upcoming regulations, or adjustments to safety processes necessitated by a change in the physical plant. The regular scheduling of these meetings lets the culture of safety message get across via repetition, repetition, and repetition. Most managers also reinforce culture of safety ideas constantly via media such as posters, messaging displays, announcements, and e-mail blasts where appropriate, as well as at occasions such as annual fit testing of respirators.

A number of executives say they are encouraging senior management participation and increasing attention to managing by measurement. These data-driven managers find that the right metrics can help pinpoint problem areas, as well as generating support from upper management. For instance, ArcelorMittal, one of the world’s largest steelmakers, has launched the “Journey to Zero” campaign to reduce workplace accidents, injuries, and occupational health problems to zero.<sup>2</sup> The company’s CEO is personally leading the campaign, which includes managing to metrics, intense employee engagement, and evolution in practices and equipment.

Should 200 employees fall ill because of high bacteria counts in the company cafeteria, the impact on productivity may be severe. So a number of managers are also expanding safety awareness throughout their organizations, adding safety procedures and data collection points well beyond the jobsite or factory floor.

Still other organizations are putting increased emphasis on prevention activities. For instance, with a better understanding of newer hand safety technology, sheet metal workers are upgrading from cotton or leather gloves. Synthetic gloves made from materials such as Kevlar® or Spectra® models from Honeywell that deliver much higher levels of cut protection — as well as lighter weight and better comfort. In another example, a company concerned about respiratory incidents may actually change its manufacturing process to “engineer out” a potentially harmful gas or airborne particle source.

In one final trend, the coming year is likely to see increasing attention from upper management. CEOs and other leaders of some larger companies are publicly emphasizing their organizations’ good safety records and ongoing safety programs. They’re also identifying measurable increases in safety as important goals for all employees. Additionally, at least a few companies have appointed safety officers at the corporate level (C-level), where their visibility and authority can have major impact in establishing a culture of safety across the organization. While these are not yet universal trends, any support from the executive suite is a hopeful sign for safety managers.

The culture of safety is a cooperative venture. A safety manager requires executive leadership and employee ownership of program goals. He or she also needs significant support from suppliers. The right supplier can assist the manager with changing standards and compliance issues, provide safety products and tools with the right features and benefits, and offer training on the right way to use those products to further the safety of every individual for every minute on the job.

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### 3. Managing safety across borders

As companies around the world consolidate, managers might assume responsibility for facilities in 10 other countries besides their own. These safety managers report that their biggest challenges in the coming year will be keeping up with regional occupational safety regulations; language barriers; cultural differences; and consistent, standardized implementation of safety management systems.

Obviously, no safety manager can overcome all these obstacles alone. Savvy managers realize that the right PPE vendor can provide critical advice and support that extends across borders. For instance, Honeywell Safety Products is now the world's largest supplier of PPE. It provides more categories of safety equipment in more countries than any other vendor.

It makes sense to look for a supplier that has multinational capabilities, global scope, the greatest breadth of product line, and a comprehensive distribution network that supports customers locally. In any particular transaction, you want to make sure you'll receive appropriate local stocking capabilities and personal, responsive service from knowledgeable distributors — especially during emergencies.

Where occupational safety standards vary from country to country, the supplier should provide clear guidance for multinational customers, specifying which part-numbered products meet which standards.

Safety regulations always differ at least somewhat from country to country, but trends are sometimes observable. For respiratory safety, mandatory fit testing (already implemented in the U.S. and Canada) is increasingly being adopted by European regulators. The U.K. has regulations in place, Germany has initiated its regulatory process, and neighboring countries should soon follow suit. Safety managers need to source respirator suppliers that offer fit-adjustable face piece technology and other fit/comfort advantages.

In emerging markets, as countries such as Brazil, China, and India outpace the rest of the world in growing their manufacturing economies, they're adopting new safety standards, increasing enforcement of standards already in place, and elevating workplace safety consciousness. Broadly speaking, managers in these countries are devoting more effort and budget to strengthening their safety systems and upgrading workers' PPE.

Finally, some vendors are making efforts, through their membership on various national standards committees, to move toward adopting the same or similar safety standards, where practicable, on a worldwide basis.

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#### **4. Selecting the right safety information sources**

The trend is for safety managers to collect and reference safety information from professional groups, government sources, and the Internet as a whole.

Government agencies can provide regulatory compliance information on workplace safety issues, since they formulate regulations, and track statistical trends across many industries.

Of course, the trend more and more, even for official sources, is to post much of their data on the Internet, which makes room for even the most specialized safety issues. For instance, the American Glovebox Society maintains quite an active Internet discussion group for safety professionals at [www.gloveboxsociety.org](http://www.gloveboxsociety.org). As the leading supplier of radiation/chemical-resistant gloves for these applications, Honeywell Safety Products provides timely technical information to group participants as appropriate.

When seeking useful information, consider the source. Governmental sites may tend to overuse complicated, legalistic language. Association sites may require expensive memberships for access to some or all of their information. Both often must cover the entire field. Their information may well be too general or too technical for clear answers to a specific question.

If you find a PPE supplier with a good, targeted Web site, consider checking there for relevant responses to your next critical question.

The right contractor or supplier can post vital information in clear language — demystified information, that's shaped precisely for users of specific safety equipment, or for organizations in a given market segment. For instance, [www.millerfallprotection.com](http://www.millerfallprotection.com) offers concise, plain-language summaries of numerous applicable regulatory standards, and training videos on the proper use of fall protection products. Visitors can click on the Ask the Expert icon, type in a question, even attach photos — and receive knowledgeable, specific answers within 24 hours.

Some vendors set up resource center sites dedicated to educational information on safety topics. For example, Howard Leight® HearForever™ initiative maintains [www.HearForever.org](http://www.HearForever.org), the Internet's definitive source for details on the latest advances, research, and discoveries relating to hearing loss prevention at work and at home. The site provides extensive expert articles, case studies, and other materials, plus interactive resources — all explaining how noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL) can be measured, reduced, and even eliminated.

In fact, numerous sites now furnish enhancements such as interactive features or instructional videos. On product selector sites, managers or users can look for pages dedicated to helping select the best safety product for their unique needs.

Of course, the local representative for your PPE manufacturer or distributor may continue to serve as your most personalized information source.

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Finally, significant and growing numbers of safety managers also turn to associations and suppliers that are using social media such as LinkedIn, Google+, and YouTube to deliver ultra-timely safety information. For instance, active discussion groups on LinkedIn serve as popular places for professionals to exchange views on specific safety hazards, procedures, and solutions. Safety information delivery via social media is one trend that's certain to gather increasing momentum for the foreseeable future.

## **Conclusion**

Like most other recent years, 2013 promises to be a busy time for safety directors and managers in organizations around the globe. Their most critical tasks are likely to include managing increasing responsibilities; transforming their workplaces to establish enduring cultures of safety; directing safety efforts across international boundaries; and seeking progressive safety information that promotes best practices. Managers can find assistance in all these endeavors from a variety of sources, including responsive, responsible suppliers of personal protective equipment.

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<sup>1</sup> 2012 ISHN Safety Managers Survey

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.arcelormittal.com/ostrava/AM\\_safe2\\_s7\\_en.html](http://www.arcelormittal.com/ostrava/AM_safe2_s7_en.html)

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## About Honeywell Safety Products

Honeywell Safety Products helps build an enduring culture of safety through comprehensive education; innovative technologies; and comfortable, high-performance products that inspire workers to make safer choices on their own. The company is the ideal partner for organizations committed to a cultural transformation that minimizes injuries and maintains a safer, more productive workplace.

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