The Dräger Safety at Work Report 2023

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Dräger Safety at Work Report

Many of you will by now be familiar with our Safety at Work Report, a summary of the key findings of our annual independent research on the topic of safety in UK workplaces.

This report aims to provide a regular snapshot of the current attitudes and challenges related to safety at work, a topic that Dräger both knows – and cares – a great deal about.

People and businesses across the UK face a raft of challenges in 2023, from the growing impact of the cost of living crisis, to an ever-growing focus on environmental and sustainability issues as the UK moves towards its 2050 Net Zero goals.

At the same time, the impact of dispersed workforces and new approaches to data and technology are influencing the future of workplace safety.

Whatever your role and how it relates to safety in the workplace, I hope that the insights within this report are not only interesting, but also useful to you and your colleagues.

Matthew Bedford
Managing Director
Draeger Safety UK

Safety at Work in 2023

Six key take-aways from this year's research

1. Employees continue to feel safer at work – due to greater company spend, company knowledge, more use of safety technology and improved safety training. However, almost half are concerned about the risk of a major safety incident in their organisation in the next five years.

2. Challenges with safety provision include skills shortages, budgetary constraints, a younger workforce with different levels of knowledge and training expectations, keeping up with regulations and evolving safety risks.

3. Cost-of-living pressures are impacting the mental health of workers, affecting sleep, focus, and productivity. An increase in anxiety and depression in the workplace may have a negative impact on safety at work.

4. Cost of living pressures may also be compromising safety in businesses through outdated equipment not being replaced, delays to servicing and testing of safety equipment, less investment in safety training and energy cost-cutting measures.

5. Sustainability is one of the key issues seen to be competing with safety as a business priority, although most think that the two can co-exist, and that sustainability can even positively impact safety. Employees are more likely to see safety as a more important consideration in choosing an employer than sustainability. However, a rush to innovate – for example in relation to the energy transition – may compromise safety, and the recent stuttering of the energy transition may slow down health and safety momentum.

6. Artificial intelligence (AI) and immersive technology is seen to play a key role in improving safety. Whilst most see safety at work as everyone's responsibility, it is seen as best achieved through a balance of smart technology and human supervisors.

- **People are feeling safer at work compared to two years ago (54%).**
- **This is highest in the under 35s where two in three (67%) feel safer compared with two years ago.**

Key reasons for feeling safer at work are:

Challenges ahead

However, looking ahead, it's widely expected that there will be challenges in relation to workplace safety provision over the next 12 months, with managers highlighting the following key areas of concern:

are concerned over skills shortages in the workforce	are concerned about budgetary constraints	are concerned about a younger workforce with different levels of knowledge and expectations with training	are concerned about keeping up with regulations	are concerned about emerging and evolving safety risks in the sector that the workforce is still getting to grips with

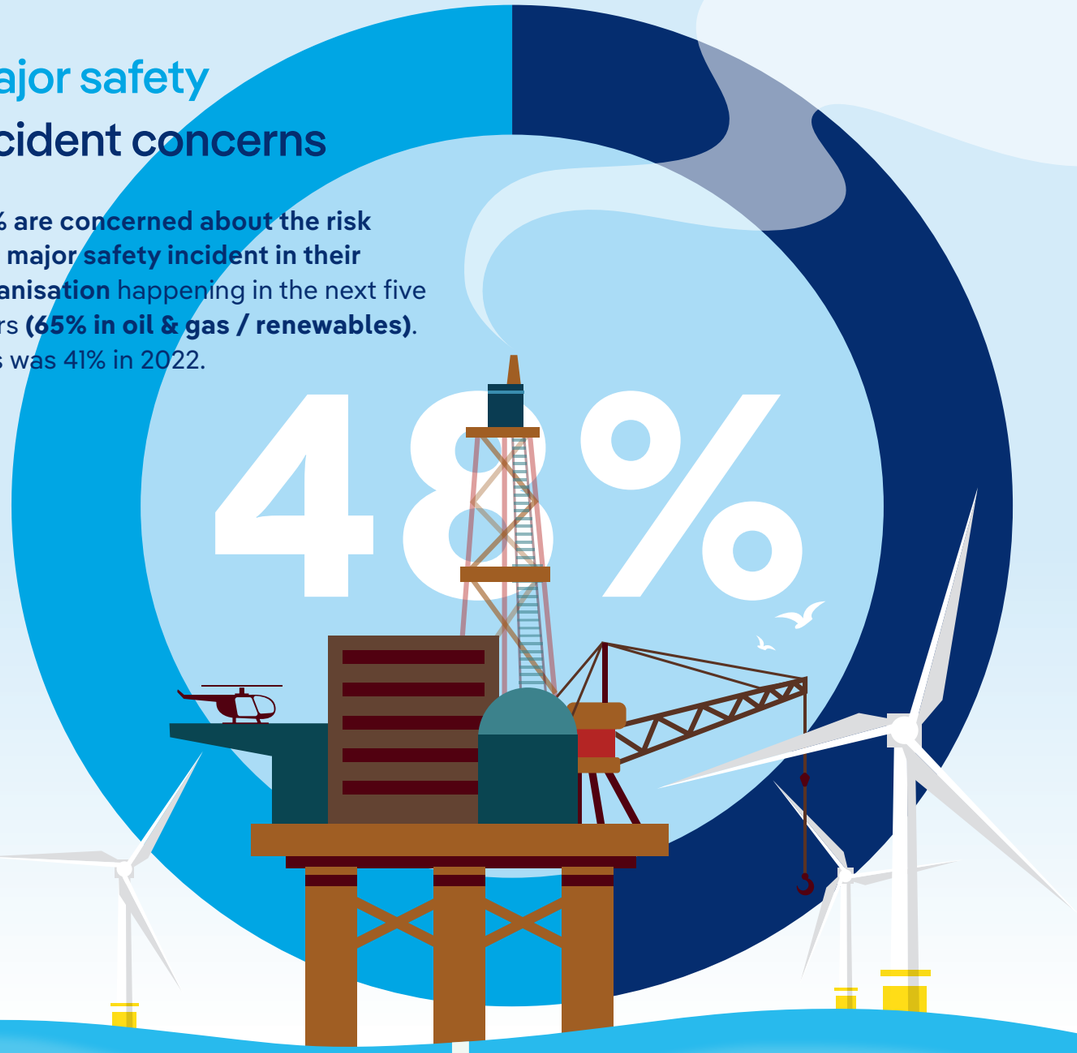
Where does responsibility for safety at work lie?

On average it is seen to reside 54% with employers and 46% with employees. But 91% say safety at work is ultimately everyone's responsibility.

Employers' responsibility | **Employees' responsibility** | **Everyone's responsibility**

Major safety incident concerns

48% are concerned about the risk of a major safety incident in their organisation happening in the next five years **(65% in oil & gas / renewables)**. This was 41% in 2022.



84%

Safety, is an important consideration in choosing an employer (84% employees agree).

Workplace Safety in the Cost of living Crisis

The cost of living crisis is not a new issue, but our 2023 research found that there are some significant concerns and issues relating to the way it is now impacting workplace safety, not least that **43% of people** are concerned that their employer may be cutting corners with safety to keep costs down.

Half of all managers, **49%, said that old or outdated safety equipment was not being replaced**, alongside a raft of other concerns around potential cost-cutting negatively impacting safety.

Manager concerns

49%	Outdated or old safety equipment not being replaced.
43%	Delaying servicing, maintenance and testing of safety equipment.
46%	Reduced investment in safety training.
43%	Energy cost cutting measures (turning lights off, turning heat down).

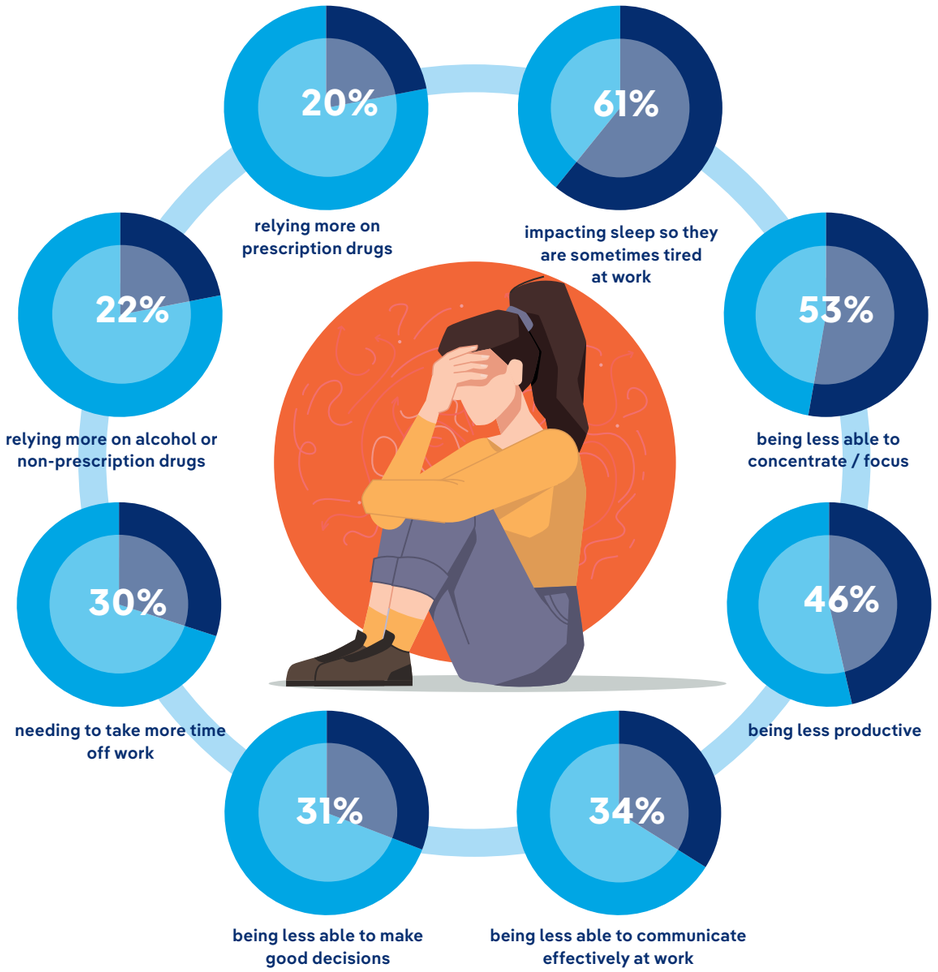
There are also a range of secondary threats, and key here is the impact of deteriorating mental health on the workforce. The Health and Safety Executive has reported rates of work-related stress have been on the increase over recent years, and the current rate is higher than the 2018/19 pre-coronavirus levels.

Our research suggests more than three in ten are currently experiencing anxiety or depression and a further 33% say that whilst they feel okay at the moment, they are worried about the mental health in the future. There was a notable gender and age split here with 44% of women and 35% of men reporting increased anxiety or depression, and 31% of those aged under 35 compared to 20% in those aged over 35.

£ 38%

38% of people report experiencing increased anxiety or depression as a result of cost of living pressures and financial difficulties.

Those with anxiety or depression report a number of impacts at work:



63%

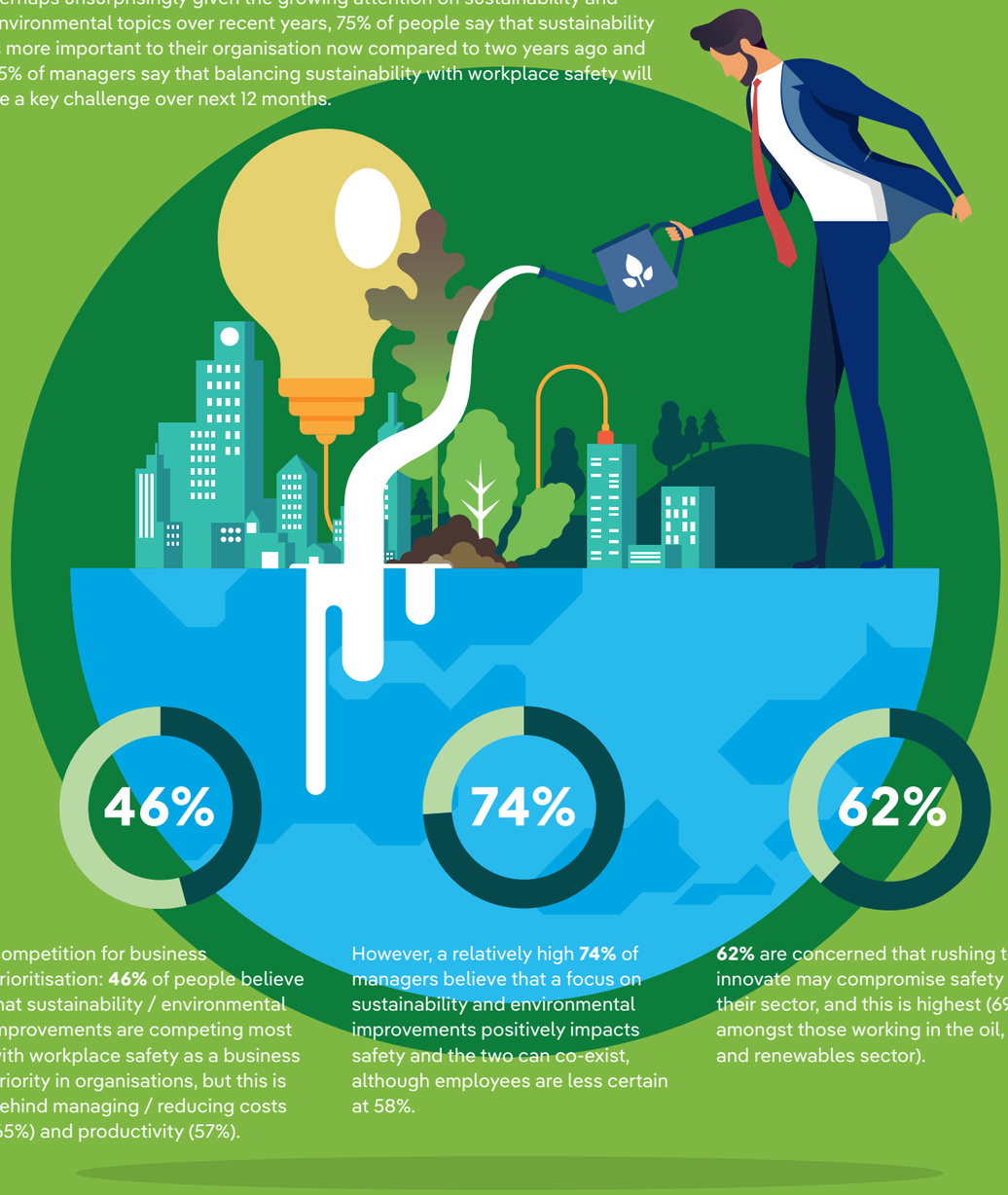
63% of all respondents think an increase in anxiety and depression in workplace may have a negative impact on safety at work - higher in those with anxiety and depression (72%), in under 35s (68%) and among managers (67%).

74%

74% are in favour of all employees in their organisation being tested for drugs and alcohol at work as part of a wider safety at work initiative – increasing to 80% in oil & gas / renewables sectors.

Safety, Sustainability and the Energy Transition

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the growing attention on sustainability and environmental topics over recent years, 75% of people say that sustainability is more important to their organisation now compared to two years ago and 75% of managers say that balancing sustainability with workplace safety will be a key challenge over next 12 months.



Competition for business prioritisation: **46%** of people believe that sustainability / environmental improvements are competing most with workplace safety as a business priority in organisations, but this is behind managing / reducing costs (65%) and productivity (57%).

However, a relatively high **74%** of managers believe that a focus on sustainability and environmental improvements positively impacts safety and the two can co-exist, although employees are less certain at 58%.

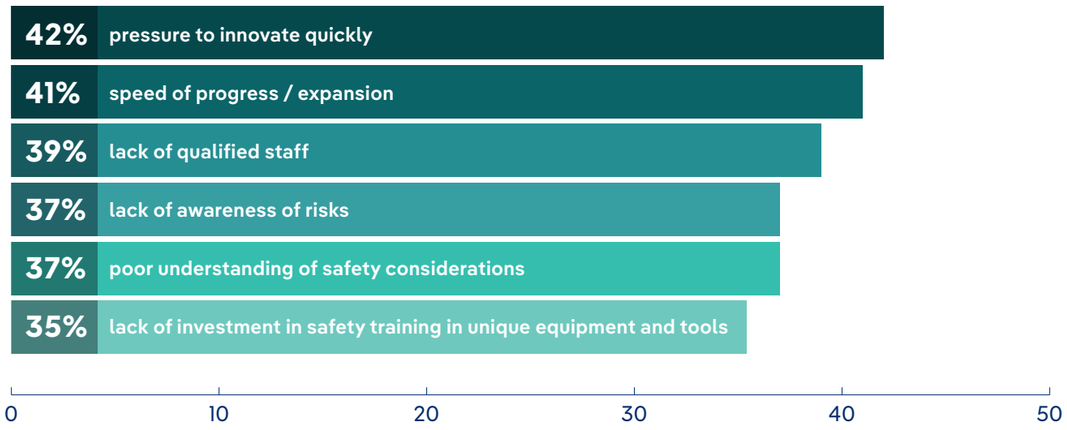
62% are concerned that rushing to innovate may compromise safety in their sector, and this is highest (69%) amongst those working in the oil, gas and renewables sector).

When it comes to choosing an employer...

Overall, however – most people think a focus on sustainability and environmental improvements positively impacts safety and that the two can comfortably co-exist (62%). While less than a third (30%) think it has no impact on safety and 8% think it negatively impacts safety and they can't coexist.

A lack of urgency, and in places problematic attitudes, relating to safety in the UK's energy transition is a topic that we raised in the very first edition of the Dräger Safety at Work Report in 2020, and we have continued to express concerns. This issue – perhaps most significantly the issue that many view renewable energy and new fuels such as hydrogen as 'clean, green and therefore safe' – has not gone away. If anything, stuttering within the UK's energy transition over the last year or so, including UK investment the energy transition falling by 10%, has served another blow to safety. In our research, 72% of those in working the oil & gas / renewables sector expressed concerns that the recent stuttering of the energy transition may slow down health and safety momentum in their sector.

The factors seen as hampering progress when it comes to safety in the UK's energy transition by those in the sector are:



Safety: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Technology and Innovation

Dräger lives and breathes safety technology, with a history in the space dating back to 1889 when Johann Heinrich Dräger developed the first reliable reducing valve for carbonic acid – the Lubeca Valve. This was the first of many pieces of safety equipment – from gas monitoring and detection devices to breathing apparatus and respirators – that the company went on to develop and manufacture. Fast forward 134 years to 2023 and it is clear that employees see many benefits of smart digital technology on safety in their workplace: These include feeling safer (52%), fewer accidents or incidents (46%) and the increased availability of safety data to improve safety decisions (45%).

Furthermore, 65% of people believe that AI and immersive technology can play a key role in improving safety in their sector (82% in oil & gas / renewables sectors and lowest in the transport industry at 56%).

81% agree that safety at work is best achieved through a balance of monitoring by smart technology / connected devices and by human supervisors. Highest in the oil and gas sector 87%).

The perceived benefits of smart and digital technology on safety in the workplace:

Conclusion

Our 2023 research has revealed that people are broadly feeling safer in the workplace compared to two years ago, an encouraging and ongoing trend which was also evident in last year's report. There are signs that companies are investing more in safety but also that the knowledge base is growing and that new technology is supporting this sense of security.

However, at the same time there is a growing sense that the cost of living crisis is beginning to have an impact on safety at work, with our research highlighting that cost of living pressures and financial difficulties are affecting the wellbeing of a significant proportion of the workforce, and suggesting that this is having a negative impact on safety. At the same time, the sustainability agenda is becoming more prominent in many businesses but overall there is confidence that this focus impacts positively on safety and that sustainability and safety can comfortably co-exist in the workplace.

When it comes to the energy transition,, there continues to be concern, with our research indicating that the recent slowdown in this area may have a negative impact on safety within the new energy sector, a topic on which our research continues to shine a spotlight.

New technology, which was one of the areas which contributes to people feeling safer at work, provides encouragement for the future with many highlighting the benefits. Although it was also recognised that a combination of technology and human supervision provides optimum of the current safety.

This year's findings offer some heartening indications that safety is being taken more seriously, but it has also highlighted that safety is not immune to the impact of economic downturn and therefore the current cost of living crisis is an area of concern for those operating in the safety industry.

About this research

This research was conducted across 1009 respondents (750 employees / 259 managers) in UK organisations with 50+ employees during March / April 2023. The research was commissioned and funded by Drager Safety UK, and conducted independently by Insight Avenue UK.

About Dräger

Dräger. Technology for Life®
Dräger is an international leader in the fields of medical and safety technology. Our products protect, support, and save lives. Founded in 1889, Dräger generated revenues of around € 3.3 billion in 2021. The Dräger Group is currently present in over 190 countries and has more than 15,000 employees worldwide. Please visit **www.draeger.com** for more information.

1 – Source: https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/, 'Summary Statistics 2022'
2 – Source: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/apr/27/uk-investment-in-clean-energy-transition-falls-10-bucking-global-trend

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