

5 trends to watch in the safety sector in 2025

The recent fiftieth anniversary of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act, and this year's similar anniversary of the establishment of the Health and Safety Executive, has provided a useful moment for those within the health and safety industry to pause and reflect.

Few of us could imagine quite how different health and safety might look in 2025 compared to 1975, and there is little doubt that we will see similar significant shifts moving forwards.

Here Dave Head, Head of Safety Marketing at Draeger Safety UK, examines some of the current and emerging trends in workplaces, and their implications for health and safety.

Wellbeing, Health and Safety

Recent years have seen a much clearer and more widespread acceptance of the link between mental and physical health, an issue which is brought into particularly sharp focus in the sphere of health and safety, with a degree of interdependence between the two. This recognition was evident from the Dräger Safety and Health at Work (DHSAW) report 2024, with more than four in five respondents (81%) stating that they believe that mental health and wellbeing are intrinsically linked to safety at work and must be managed together.

The significance of mental health and wellbeing within the overall management of health and safety should not be underestimated. According to the Health and Safety Executive¹ (HSE), one in four people in the UK will experience a mental health problem at some point in their lives. Meanwhile 82% of respondents to our 2024 research saw a greater focus on mental health and wellbeing as important for driving businesses and Government to rethink their approach to Health and Safety.

The issue is further heightened in the younger generation, with nearly three in five (59%) of Generation Z (those born between 1997 and 2006, so aged between 19 and 28) saying that they are currently experiencing anxiety or depression as a result of the cost of living pressures and financial difficulties.

Research by McKinsey² goes further, suggesting that mental health and wellbeing is not only a factor in defining health and safety, but that positive wellbeing is responsible for wider business success, improving productivity and innovation. While industry experts at a recent webinar hosted by the British Safety Council suggested that embedding wellbeing into business culture drives recruitment and retention of staff and that a company's approach to the wellbeing of its staff is increasingly seen as a key factor in employment decisions, particularly for the younger generation.

¹ <https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/mental-health.htm>

² <https://www.mckinsey.com/mhi/our-insights/working-nine-to-thrive>

As a result, the lines between employee health, safety and wellbeing are becoming increasingly blurred, with many businesses now recognising and addressing concepts such as psychological safety and holistic wellness, and looking at how they can support employees in this regard; in doing so, safeguarding health and safety in the workplace in the broadest sense.

Increased blurring of Human Resources (HR) and Health & Safety

In light of the above and given the fact that this trend shows no signs of diminishing in the near future, one growing requirement within businesses is likely to be the need for increased alignment between corporate human resources (HR) and health and safety functions in order to manage and support on such issues.

As a result, increased collaboration and day-to-day joint working between these teams, as well as more joined-up strategic oversight, is likely to be an important consideration within businesses over the coming months and years.

It is, however, worth noting that the increasing focus on mental health issues is not seen as without issue. The Dräger Safety and Health at Work report highlighted that a considerable 67% of respondents feel that a disproportionate focus on mental health versus ‘traditional’ health and safety issues is likely to pose a challenge to workplace safety in the short term. This perhaps suggests that the right balance is yet to be found in the majority of workplaces, and may take some time to achieve, particularly given that there are indications that the prevalence of mental health conditions is yet to reach a peak.

Gen Z and evolving expectations

We have already touched briefly on examples of generational differences when it comes to the mental health of workers, and the potential impact health and safety, but there are also broader differences in the expectations and attitudes of Gen Z employees. In particular, our research found that younger generations have a higher expectation that their employers will prioritise their health and safety, including mental, emotional and physical wellbeing. This issue is seen as one of the top future challenges (second only to skills shortages) to workplace safety provision over the coming 12 months.

Gen Z is a generation that has high expectations of employers³ and for whom transparency, social conscience, inclusivity and diversity are often valued highly, but one of the most prominent disparities identified in the research was the different levels of knowledge, learning patterns and training expectations from younger employees, suggesting that training will be one of the leading challenges in the future of safety at work.

Younger employees are not content with an approach of workplace shadowing and instead have an expectation that safety training will be more structured and more formal, a view which came not only from their own responses but across all generations, with more than

³ <https://hrnews.co.uk/gen-z-the-generation-that-wants-it-all/>

three quarters (76%) of all respondents indicating that the younger generation have higher expectations when it comes to health and safety training.

At the same time, younger employees are more likely to view the Government as being predominantly responsible for health and safety at work – with a third of Gen Zs expressing this view compared to just 20% of those in the oldest age bracket (aged 61 – 79).

These generational differences in attitudes towards workplace safety are likely to contribute to a disruption of traditional views on the subject, and potentially lead to a rethink of the very definition of health and safety and the approaches taken in order to meet these expectations moving forward.

Safety innovation and technology

As in many areas of business, it is clear that there exists significant potential for technological innovation to positively impact health and safety in the workplaces of the future. Almost three quarters (73%) think that the potential of digital growth (such as AI and connectivity) should be driving a future rethink on health and safety.

We have already seen many significant positive advances in the field of safety technology over recent years – advances such as developments in the use of wireless connectivity and remote monitoring for applications such as gas detection in order to offer a range of improvements for industrial applications across sectors including clean tech and renewables.

Despite this, however, just a third (31%) feel that their company is currently making good use of such technologies, and a quarter (25%) think that their company is waiting for others to take the lead. This caution may well be due to the (entirely understandable) importance of evidencing such technologies as proven and reliable in the field prior to widespread adoption, and this must be borne in mind in order to maintain confidence in safety innovation.

Given the broadening range of challenges that are now being faced by health and safety professionals in light of the topics discussed earlier in this piece, alongside the continued financial pressures being faced more broadly, there is little doubt that technology and innovation will become increasingly important for the future of safety, and this is an area of intense focus within Dräger at the moment.

Training and skills

Skills shortages are seen as an ongoing challenge in the coming years, with more than a third of workers (36%) believing that the issue is having a detrimental impact on workplace safety.

It is also clear that there is a high expectation from employees as a whole when it comes to health and safety training: 93% expecting formal safety training as opposed to shadowing or being shown by colleagues, yet only 68% feel that this expectation is being met by their employer.

As mentioned previously, the younger generation tend to have the highest expectations around training and safety, which may come from this generation being more risk-averse as a group⁴. However, with younger employees more likely to move jobs more regularly early on in their career, the DSHAW research addressed the question of whether companies should invest in the best safety training for employees regardless of how long they stay with a company. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the great majority – 87% – feel that this commitment is essential. So, while this is a significant investment for businesses, it is clearly a crucial area. The basic premise of keeping people safe and returning them safely to their families at the end of the day, is of vital importance, and investment to ensure this happens is something which employees clearly rate as an essential element of their relationship with their employer.

⁴ <https://www.montclair.edu/newscenter/2023/12/13/study-gen-z-perceive-risk-everywhere-they-turn-early-research-shows/>