

Survey Identifies 4 Barriers to Safety in the Oil & Gas Industry



Improving safety, even in especially hazardous industries, can be an uphill battle. If you don't think your company is maximizing its safety potential, you should try to identify the barriers that are getting in the way. And the key to determining what's standing in the way is to ask those people who may be in the best position to know: workers and safety managers.

That's exactly what [Dräger](#), an international safety technology company, did on an industry-wide basis. It conducted a [two-part survey](#) of frontline workers' and safety managers' perspectives on the state of safety in the oil and gas sector.

The goal of the survey's first phase was to obtain an assessment of sentiment among 50 safety managers on strategies, policies and activities pursued to enhance worker safety. Researchers spoke with safety managers from organizations throughout the US who were employed in various aspects of the oil and gas industry.

To get the frontline worker perspective and additional safety manager insight, researchers used a survey that produced a quantitative/qualitative assessment of worker safety reflecting sentiment from a combined 79 safety managers and workers.

Results: The majority of frontline workers (69%) and safety managers (61.9%) feel their current or previous employers often considered their safety, as well as provided the necessary training and equipment. But the respondents agreed that opportunities for improvement exist, with 66.6% of safety managers ranking their current or previous safety culture as 'medium,' while a mere one-third identified it as 'strong.'

What Are the Leading Safety Roadblocks'

The survey identified four factors as the biggest roadblocks to safety in the industry:

1. Worker complacency. The survey unequivocally acknowledged worker complacency as one of the greatest inhibitors to enhanced safety. In fact, in part one of the survey, 18% of safety managers believe it to be the *most significant* roadblock to greater safety. And part two of the survey revealed that more than half of workers don't bump test their gas detection devices prior to each day's use in accordance with the recommended OSHA guideline. Only 28% conduct a bump test once a week, 8.7% twice a month, 6.5% at their discretion, 28.3% didn't know and 4.3% never perform a test. Comparatively, 61.9% of safety managers conduct bump tests prior to each day's use, despite monitoring workers who often don't do the same.

2. Training. Because of ongoing technological advancements, there's a need for continual education and training to ensure the proper and safe use of new and advanced equipment, as well as a greater understanding of how to react in the event of a life-threatening incident. However, the survey found that 61.9% of safety managers are 'somewhat' to 'not satisfied' with the frequency of safety education and training occurring at their current or most recent worksite.

The survey also found that 71.4% of safety managers and 71.7% of workers agree that incidents are learning opportunities,

further illustrating that in-the-moment teaching is found to be most effective, even though it's not being conducted regularly in many cases. Also, 66.7% of surveyed safety managers feel hazards and risks are only 'often' or 'somewhat' communicated to them following a life-threatening incident; 52.1% of surveyed workers are 'often' or 'never' made aware of events.

3. Communication. The survey confirms that talk isn't cheap when it comes to alerting fellow workers to safety concerns. Overwhelmingly, both frontline workers (93.5%) and safety managers (95.2%) said that they speak up when they observe a co-worker deviating from a safe practice.

Although workers are talking when an unsafe practice or procedure occurs, it's also evident that lessons learned may not be passed around the worksite, especially after a life-threatening incident. For example, nearly 43% of safety managers felt they were only 'sometimes' or 'rarely' informed when an incident that posed an imminent threat to a worker's life occurred, whereas 56.5% of workers felt they were 'sometimes,' 'rarely' or 'never' told.

4. Profits over people. Many survey participants believe that maximizing productivity while reducing costs comes at the expense of worker safety. Productivity pressure was ranked as the leading cause to preventing a stronger commitment to safety.

To shift this behaviour, companies must place greater focus on recruiting and investing in the right workforce, and in acquiring and training on effective technology. For example, to promote safer behaviour, companies could incentivize workers beyond their hourly rate. The survey revealed that more than half of workers (54.3%) and safety managers (57.1%) believe this option is the best for encouraging a greater commitment to safety.

Bottom line: To maximize the industry's safety achievements, companies must showcase their passion for their employees' well-being from the top down in order for it to radiate throughout the workplace. When companies invest in their people by equipping them with the right technology and training, their people will reward them by maintaining a safe worksite.

For more on the Canadian view on safety in the oil and gas industry, read about the [Canadian National Energy Board's paper](#) on how companies in this sector can improve their safety and environmental management.