NATIONAL SAFETY SURVEY:

Winning Hearts and Minds

Engaging the workforce in safety is the No. 1 goal for many EHS professionals.

By **Josh Cable**

Thirty-two teams, four regions, five weeks and 4,086 safety issues found and fixed. By the numbers, that's how the 2014 NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament stacked up for Kimberly Burgess.

As the environmental, health and safety manager for Ingersoll Rand's Trane manufacturing plant in Lynn Haven, Fla., Burgess always is on the lookout for creative ways to engage the plant's 850 employees in workplace safety. So when March Madness rolled around this year, she saw it as a golden opportunity.

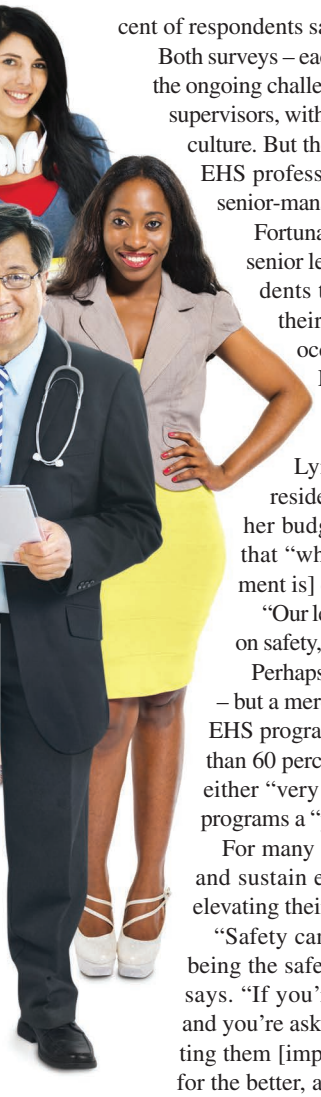
"My husband was filling out his brackets, and I got to thinking about the whole March Madness thing, 'Wouldn't it be cool if you could do something like that to get everyone engaged, but give it a safety theme?'" Burgess recalls.

And with that light-bulb moment, "EHS Madness" was born. Burgess divided the plant's workforce into four regions – just like the NCAA tourney – with eight teams per region. The object of the game: Find and fix the most safety issues. At stake: Free lunch for the winning team, T-shirts and – perhaps most importantly – bragging rights.

Burgess sold the idea to team leaders and posted brackets for everyone to see. Even as the field whittled itself down, she kept everyone engaged with the promise of restaurant gift cards for every team in the region that produced the champion. And when the competition hit a fever pitch, Burgess had "stacks and stacks" of documented safety corrections piled on her desk.

"I killed a few trees with it, but it was worth it," Burgess says. "Everybody had fun and we fixed a lot of little issues on the floor, so it was really cool."

Burgess is on the front lines of a never-ending battle being waged by many EHS professionals. In EHS Today's 2014 National Safety Survey, nearly 50 percent of respondents pointed to employee engagement as their No. 1 goal this year. In a separate survey on EHSToday.com, 65 per-



cent of respondents said they have the same goal.

Both surveys – each of which received nearly 900 responses – point to the ongoing challenge of winning the hearts and minds of workers and supervisors, with the end goal of a world-class, self-sustaining safety culture. But the plant-level workforce is just part of the puzzle for EHS professionals, who depend on – and often must solicit – senior-management support of safety.

Fortunately, a healthy majority of our readers indicate that senior leaders are stepping up. Nearly 80 percent of respondents to the 2014 National Safety Survey indicate that their executives provide active and visible support for occupational safety and health. A smaller majority of EHS professionals (64 percent) say they work in organizations that prioritize safety over production.

That's been the case for Burgess at the Trane Lynn Haven facility, which makes commercial and residential HVAC units. Senior leaders are receptive to her budget requests for safety initiatives, as they realize that "when we invest in something like that, [the investment is] easily recouped."

"Our leadership team doesn't even blink at spending money on safety, recognition and engagement," Burgess says.

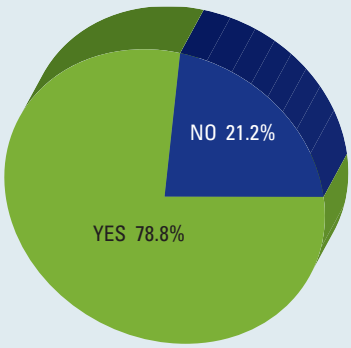
Perhaps they're being hard on themselves – or just modest – but a mere 5 percent of survey respondents characterize their EHS programs as "world-class." Encouragingly, though, more than 60 percent of respondents describe their EHS programs as either "very good" or "good," and only 3.4 percent give their programs a "poor" grade.

For many EHS professionals, developing strategies to build and sustain employee engagement will be one of the keys to elevating their safety programs to the next level.

"Safety can get really boring and dry. If all you're doing is being the safety cop, people aren't going to respond," Burgess says. "If you're out there helping people and engaging them, and you're asking for their ideas and running with them and getting them [implemented], then they see that things are changing for the better, and they're more apt to help you figure out how to make their jobs better, easier and safer."

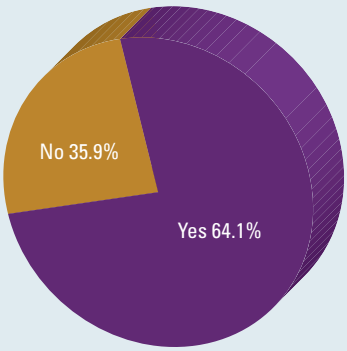
Management Support

Does top management in your organization provide active and visible support for occupational safety and health?



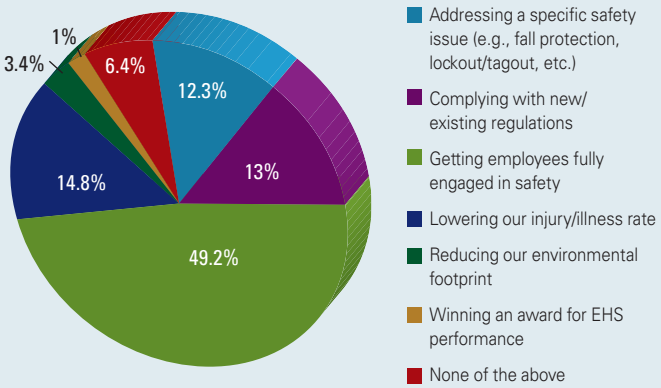
Safety vs. Production

Does your organization prioritize safety over production and/or other business demands?



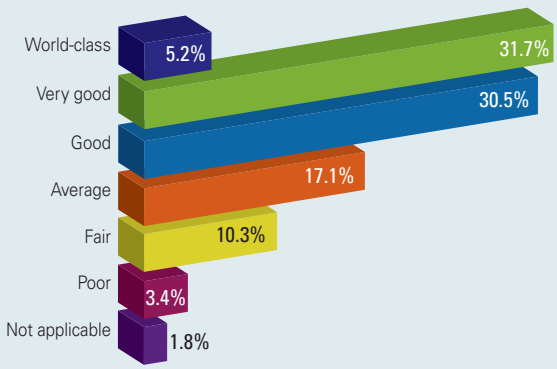
TOP EHS GOALS

What is your top EHS goal this year?



The Quest for World-Class

How would you describe the EHS program in your facility/organization?



Portrait of an EHS Professional

Based on the 2014 National Safety Survey, most EHS professionals are seasoned veterans with a wide range of responsibilities – and they're well-compensated for their hard work.

Keeping workers safe and healthy is a challenging prospect, and for too many EHS professionals, it can be a grueling, grinding tug of war with production demands. But EHS managers are a resilient bunch, and many of them bring to bear years of experience – not to mention professional certification – in their noble quest for zero injuries.

In EHS Today's 2014 National Safety Survey, 35 percent of respondents indicated that they've been in the safety profession for more than 20 years (the No. 1 answer for that question). Nearly 33 percent of respondents said they bring more than 10 years of experience to the table.

A whopping 80 percent of respondents said they are certified safety professionals, while 22 percent said they are qualified environmental professionals and 21 percent said they hold master's degrees.

As their titles imply, most EHS managers have plenty on their plates. On top of the core job function of safety, a majority of EHS professionals in our survey said they also oversee emergency management (64 percent), environmental compliance (60 percent), ergonomics (66 percent), fire protection (62 percent), industrial hygiene (62 percent) and occupational health (76 percent). Nearly 33 percent of respondents manage security, while 27 percent run wellness programs.

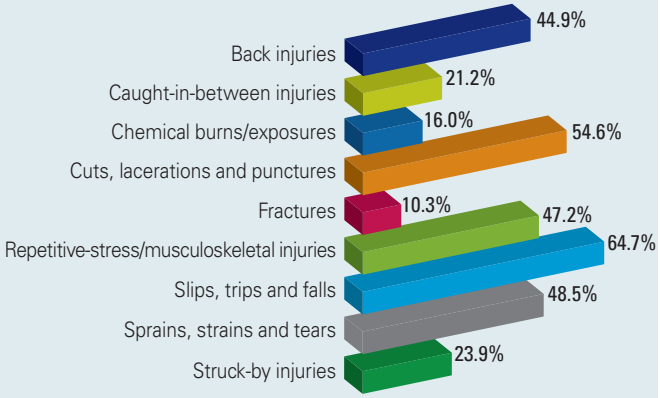
Universal Challenges

When we asked EHS professionals to tell us where they'd most like to see improvement in their safety programs, some common themes emerged in their written responses. Do any of these challenges sound familiar?

- "More employee involvement in safety programs."
- "Walking and not just talking by senior management."
- "Having managers/supervisors/employees accountable to EHS managers."
- "More time to properly train."
- "A stronger safety presence by managers, directors, VPs, etc."
- "Standardization and [behavior-based safety]."

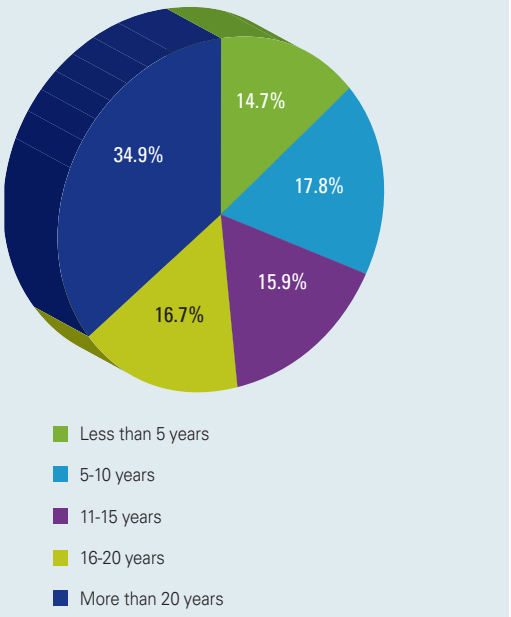
Areas of Focus

Which of the following types of injuries/illnesses are you actively targeting in your organization/facility?



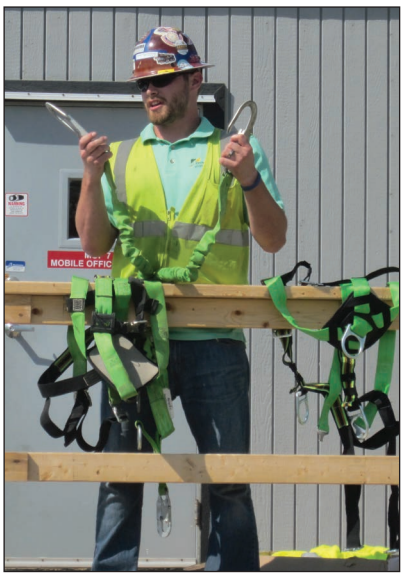
Experience

How long have you worked in the environmental, health and safety (EHS) field or had safety responsibilities?



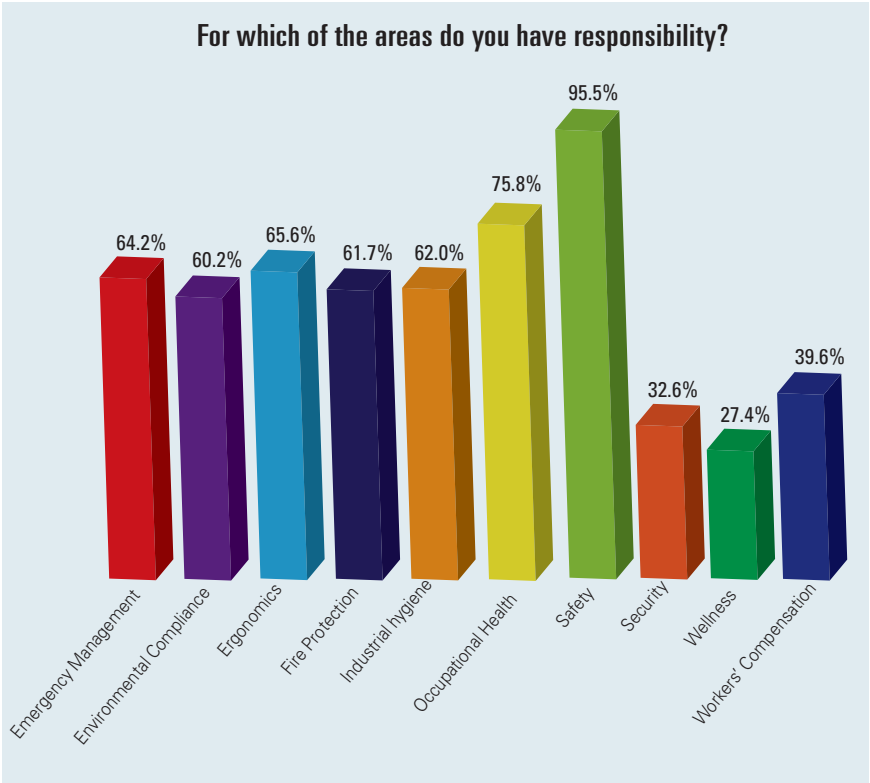
- "Employee engagement at all levels."
- "Management involvement and supervisor accountability."
- "More training."
- "Engaging everyone in the plant."
- "Improving our leading-indicator process."
- "Managers becoming champions for safety!"
- "More funding and staff."
- "Safety of employees given priority over production.
- "Increased supervisor involvement and accountability for safety improvements and violations."
- "Reporting of near misses."
- "Develop a formal ergonomics program."
- "More employee engagement."
- "Even more employee engagement."
- "Safety culture – that is treating safety as less than a novelty and more of an essential base for work functions."

While the quotes above might paint a dreary picture of the profession, EHS managers are well-compensated for their blood, sweat and tears. Nearly 19 percent of survey respondents said they earn more than $105,000 per year – up from 16 percent of respondents in the 2013 survey. Some 65 percent of EHS professionals indicated that they make $65,000 or more.

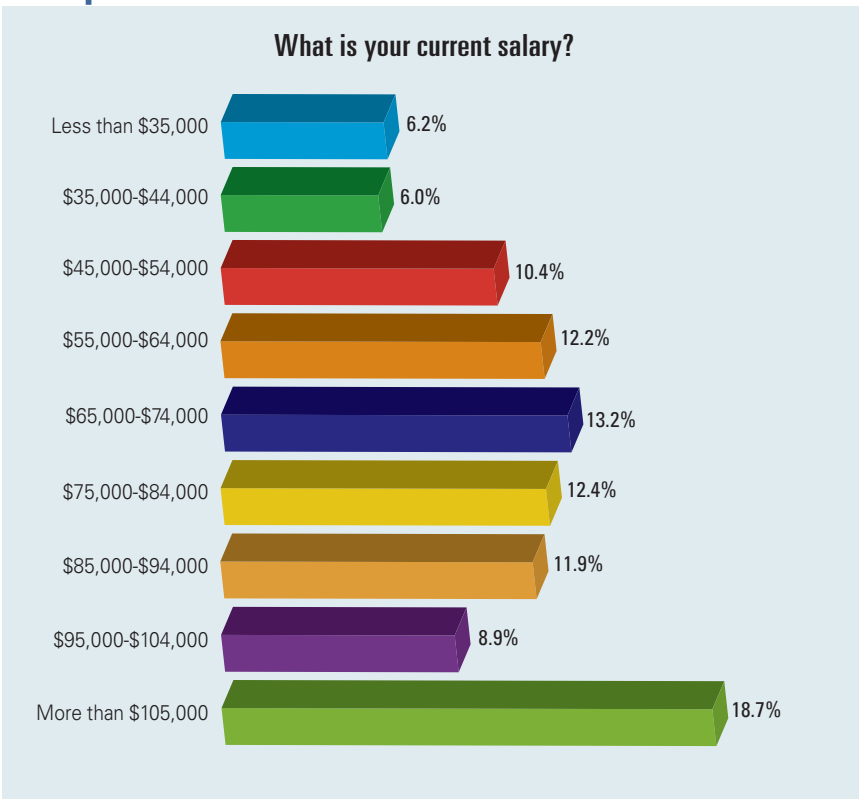


Tyler Edwards, site safety manager for the eastbound Innerbelt Bridge project in Cleveland

Areas of Responsibility



Compensation



Celebrating Wins, Acknowledging Challenges – and Venting Frustration

EHS professionals weren't shy about tooting their own horns in our annual survey, nor were they the least bit sheepish about telling it like it is – whether it's good, bad or ugly.

When asked to "share an example of a workplace EHS-related challenge that your company solved or improved in the last year," respondents were brutally honest. Their answers ranged from the rudimentary ("started a safety program") to the profound ("took a caring approach to employee safety"), with a treasure trove of best practices in between. Among them, EHS professionals told us that they:

- Launched fall protection programs.
- Made factory thoroughfares safer.
- Installed machine guarding.
- Offered incentives for contractors to work safely.
- Purchased or upgraded PPE.
- Improved forklift safety.
- Instituted a mandatory glove policy.
- Encouraged supervisors to take more ownership of safety.
- Provided GHS training.
- Achieved OHSAS 18001 certification.
- Implemented or improved near-miss reporting.
- Tackled ergonomic issues.

Those were just a few of the many wins that EHS managers earned over the past year. But not everyone was so fortunate. A number of survey respondents vented that their safety initiatives lack management support, supervisor cooperation and/or employee participation. Others pointed to a production-first business mentality hampering their efforts.

A number of respondents indicated that they were unable to name even one EHS challenge that they addressed. One safety manager lamented, "I wish I could."

Finally, we'd be remiss if we didn't acknowledge the responses that tickled our funny bone – whether the humor was intended or not. One safety manager simply stated: "We fixed the ladder." Another offered this tongue-in-cheek response: "They hired me!"

The Good

"We reduced eye injuries with training, awareness and a change in PPE."

"834 days without a lost-time accident."

"I created a workplace violence/harassment program and implemented it with great success."

The Bad

"With the worst winter in decades, it's been a rough year for our delivery employees. "

"Not enough time in the day to do everything. Not enough staff."

"We maintained our current status with no appreciable improvement."

The Ugly

"Safety is the least important aspect of the business."

"I'd like to see top management acknowledge that safety even exists."

"Old boss cared more about production than safety. He finally retired."

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT: */ehstoday.com/galleries/worker-complaints-safety*