



Worker engagement and participation

Overview

For the first time, worker engagement and participation survey results are presented in a separate report. The intention is to enable a more high-level view of this aspect of workplace health and safety. The report's primary focus is employee perceptions because they are the key to improving worker engagement and participation. Two themes emerge:



Employers consistently have a more positive view than employees about worker engagement and participation.



Training and worker engagement and participation are linked. Workers with recent health and safety training are more likely to be aware of, and actively involved in, health and safety in their workplace.

Worker engagement

Results are much the same as last year, although there has been a gradual improvement in worker engagement responses since 2014.

The survey used four measures to determine levels of worker engagement:



Involvement in health and safety decisions: 79% of employees say this happens most or all of the time, compared with 85% of employers.



Open discussion of health and safety risks: 76% of employees say this happens most or all of the time, compared with 88% of employers.



Reporting hazards, near misses and accidents to a boss or supervisor: 67% of employees say this happens most or all of the time, compared with 78% of employers.



Making a difference to workplace health and safety: 67% of employees say they really make a difference to health and safety in their workplace. (Employers were not asked this question.)

Recent health and safety training markedly improves responses to three of the four measures (open discussion, reporting problems, and making a difference).

Sector snapshots

FORESTRY

Forestry workers responded most positively to all four engagement questions, and led by a good margin (ranges: 77% to 88%).

AGRICULTURE

The big improvement (from a 2014 perspective) is workers' reporting of hazards, near misses and accidents.

CONSTRUCTION

Construction workers are the least likely to report health and safety hazards to their boss.

MANUFACTURING

Manufacturing workers are the least likely to agree they have a say in decisions, or that health and safety risks are discussed openly. (The latter measure attracted 84% support from workers with recent training, but only 68% support from those without any training.)

Worker participation

Three factors contribute to worker participation:

WORKPLACE PRACTICES

The survey asks about 12 practices, ranging from health and safety representatives, committees and meetings to noticeboards, websites, formal safety audits and health and safety policies. (In all, 79% of employees and 86% of employers report at least one such practice.)

WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

This includes everyone trying to improve safety, working together on being safe, encouraging new ideas, confidence in approaching the boss, and support for stopping work over a hazard. (Worker response range: 64% to 87%; employer response range: 87% to 92%.)

TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

This includes encouraging workers to speak up, confidence about raising safety concerns with co-workers, sharing information, easy-to-understand information, and being told how views are considered. (Worker response range: 53% to 78%; employer response range: 69% to 96%.)

WORKPLACE PRACTICES

The proportion of workers saying their workplace has no participation practices has risen from 10% in 2016 to 17% in 2017, principally because of the large increase in agriculture workers who report no such practices (up from 21% to 31%). The proportion of employers saying there are no participation practices in their business is unchanged at 14%.

About half of employers and employees rank the most common practices as regular health and safety meetings and inclusion of health and safety as a regular item in group and team meetings.

WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

Forestry workers score highest on all five measures of workplace environment (range: 77% to 92%), while manufacturing workers score lowest on four of the five (range: 60% to 83%). Agriculture workers score lowest on employer encouragement of new ideas (63%).

Employers are more positive than employees about whether there is a supportive work safety environment (employers: about 90%; employees: between 60% and 70%). The biggest gap in perceptions is about whether a boss would support workers who suggest stopping work over a possible risk or hazard (employers: 92%; employees: 68%).

TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

Employers and employees differ quite markedly on this aspect of worker participation. For example:

96% of employers say employees are encouraged to speak up if they feel something is unsafe. Only 75% of employees consider this so.

81% of employers say employees are always told how their views have been considered in reaching health and safety decisions. Only 53% of employees think this is so.

Positive responses can vary according to whether and how recently workers have received training. For example, the statement that bosses always give easy-to-understand health and safety information drew a positive response from 57% of employees who had never had any training, but a positive response from 77% of those who had received training in the previous six months.

Forestry workers were the most positive on all five communication measures (range: 67% to 87%), while manufacturing workers were the least positive (range: 49% to 77%). Manufacturing and forestry workers share last place on encouragement to speak up if something feels unsafe (73%).

Training

In the previous 12 months, 51% of employees received some formal health and safety training, down on the previous year's figure of 58%. (In 2017, 42% of employers received some training.) The proportion of employees who had never had any formal training was 21%, more or less unchanged since 2014. (For employers, the figure is 27%.)

Construction and forestry lead the way in training, with 66% of construction workers and 58% of forestry workers having had some training in the previous 12 months. For employers, the proportion is 55% and 63% respectively. Agriculture trails for both employee and employer training (28% and 32% respectively).