Executive Safety Report
Key Insights

Executive Summary

If you're accountable for safety in a shifting, high-stakes environment, this report is your fast track from noise to action. It captures what peers are doing now to cut SIF exposure, align contractors, and turn AI and data into results—without trading speed for safety.

Inside, you'll get a concise playbook: choose contractors for culture fit and leading-indicator governance; guard safety values amid volatility with plain-language, field-ready communication and visible leadership; future-proof EHS through succession, upskilling, and business alignment; and reframe AI as actionable insights via integrated data and predictive oversight. Read it, apply it, move the needle.

Capital Improvement and Contracted Workforce Risks

Situation

Organizations increasingly rely on three types of contracted partnerships as part of their operational strategy: construction and capital improvement partners; outsourcing of less frequently performed specialized tasks, such as annual inspections and complex maintenance; and augmented or supplemental staffing to address operational fluctuations or internal resource shortages. Despite this growing reliance, traditional procurement processes still emphasize technical capability, cost, and schedule over mutually beneficial KPIs such as worker engagement, safety, and well-being. Leaders managing large volumes of contractors noted that site-specific safety plans are often signed without being read or understood. Research shows that the dynamics between developers, contractors, and subcontractors are unique in construction, with each party contributing their own safety culture to the worksite[1].

Complication

When cost and schedule pressures dominate contractor selection, companies inadvertently incentivize unsafe behavior. Research shows that financial pressure and deadlines often lead contractors to cut corners or work through injuries[2]. Site-specific safety plans and job safety analyses may look robust on paper, yet inconsistent execution and "checkbox" compliance allow risk tolerance to bleed into day-to-day work. Complex projects span multiple regions and languages, making it difficult for internal teams to maintain consistent oversight. Language barriers and disparate cultures make it hard for owner teams to gauge real understanding, and many contractors lack risk intelligence or are unfamiliar with the plant environment. High turnover among trades and the use of specialist contractors exacerbate this challenge, because crews arrive with widely differing standards of acceptable risk. Monitoring and post-job evaluations remain weak points, and scorecards and metrics can be gamed, particularly if daily indicators never change. Eventually, teams become immune to them and pursue numbers at the expense of meaningful risk reduction.

Capital Improvement and Contracted Workforce Risks *Continued*

Implication

If organizations fail to move from reactive to proactive approaches, they will continue to be surprised by injuries and near misses. Traditional safety measures are inherently reactive, addressing incidents only after they occur. Without meaningful pre-job planning, real-time data, and cultural alignment, high-risk activities may proceed unchecked, leading to fatalities, regulatory penalties, and project delays. A lack of values alignment can also erode trust and collaboration. Research highlights that contractor and client cultures influence one another, so misalignment can undermine the safety behaviors of both groups[1]. In the long term, poor contractor safety performance damages reputation and profitability and creates barriers to attracting and retaining qualified partners.

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Safety should be an equal pillar with cost and schedule, and organizations must proactively manage contractor risk rather than reacting to incidents. This requires a cultural shift: contractors are not disposable labor but partners whose safety values must align with the owner's. High-performing organizations recognize that aligning safety cultures is a shared responsibility and a competitive advantage. Rather than displacing risk, leaders must acknowledge that "risk is risk" and focus on bleeding off tolerance through predictive insights and collaborative governance. Contractor selection should therefore include assessment of cultural fit and safety behaviors, and governance should include mutual alignment on scorecards, success factors, exposure control, and corrective actions. Lagging statistics and punitive measures should be secondary approaches.

Capital Improvement and Contracted Workforce Risks *Continued*

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Recommended Actions

• **Align values and incentives** during contractor selection by evaluating how well a contractor's safety culture complements the organization's culture and ensuring that profitability measures and incentives support shared safety outcomes. Use culture conversation frameworks to define what safety excellence looks like in knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors. Maintain transparency about business pressures while insisting that safety remains non-negotiable.

  • *Benefit: Values alignment fosters trust and engagement, creating mutually beneficial partnerships in which contractors feel valued and are motivated to uphold the owner's standards. When incentives support safety rather than conflict with it, contractors can pursue both profitability and protection, eliminating the false choice between productivity and safety.*

• **Embrace predictive analytics** by investing in tools and processes that analyze historical and real-time data, such as incident reports, near misses, and field observations, to forecast where risks will emerge. Use these insights to prioritize interventions before incidents occur and to adjust oversight intensity based on risk levels, rather than simply reacting to lagging indicators.

  • *Benefit: Proactive, data-driven oversight identifies hazards before they manifest and allocates resources where they'll have the most significant impact. This approach detects early signs of normalization of deviance and operational drift, allowing organizations to correct course before minor deviations accumulate into major hazards. By continuously monitoring leading indicators and weak signals, organizations build system capacity and develop the characteristics of high-reliability organizations.*

Capital Improvement and Contracted Workforce Risks *Continued*

Recommended Actions

• **Strengthen pre-job planning and field engagement** by requiring contractors to develop activity hazard analysis and site-specific safety plans, and review them jointly before work begins. Follow up with regular safety walks and coaching conversations during execution to ensure that plans are actually implemented. Executive safety culture charrettes and "craft-led" meetings allow owner and contractor leaders to discuss upcoming milestones and share feedback early. Research shows that highly engaged workplaces can see up to a 70% reduction in safety incidents[3].

  • *Benefit: Joint planning and consistent field presence ensures that safety plans move beyond paper compliance to actual implementation. Regular touchpoints create opportunities for real-time course correction and demonstrate leadership commitment, building trust and accountability between owners and contractors.*

• **Establish clear governance and accountability** by creating a governance framework that articulates roles, responsibilities, and expectations for both owners and contractors. Align scorecards to measure leading indicators and confidence in controls, not just incident rates. Tailor metrics to reflect the maturity of controls and avoid fixation on static numbers. Empower all workers with stop work authority and make it culturally acceptable to pause a job when conditions are unsafe.

  • *Benefit: Clear governance removes ambiguity about who is responsible for what, while leading indicators provide early warning of emerging risks. Stop-work authority empowers the workforce to act on their concerns, creating a culture where safety truly comes first and where pausing work is seen as responsible leadership rather than a productivity loss.*

Capital Improvement and Contracted Workforce Risks *Continued*

Recommended Actions

• **Integrate contractors into continuous improvement** by treating contractor incidents and observations as organizational learning opportunities. Debrief incidents involving contractors alongside internal events, capture lessons learned, and refine procedures accordingly. Build communities of practice where contractors and employees can share insights and where contractors are included in the development of balanced scorecards and predictive models.

  • *Benefit: Treating contractors as true partners in safety improvement leverages their unique perspectives and expertise, enriching organizational learning. Over time, these practices build a reputation as a preferred client—one that cares about people as much as results—which attracts high-quality contractors and supports sustainable, profitable capital projects.*

Safety Strategy Amid Geopolitical and Socioeconomic Volatility

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Situation

Global politics and economic turbulence are creating unprecedented uncertainty for businesses. The session began with leaders acknowledging that their organizations are changing faster and operating in a constant-change environment. External issues such as political unrest, supply chain disruptions, and inflation compete for attention and can dilute focus on core safety programs. Despite these pressures, each organization must continue to improve safety performance and prevent catastrophic incidents.

Complication

Participants shared that volatility has introduced "noise and change" that distracts the workforce and puts long-term safety strategies at risk. When organizations chase the cheapest contractor or compromise core safety anchors under financial pressure, employees notice, and trust erodes. Leaders described a tendency to react to financial results or shareholder expectations by wavering on safety commitments. This increases the risk of incidents and makes it harder to maintain a unified culture. At the same time, employees are experiencing communication fatigue, with lengthy safety messages ignored and ambiguous or vague instructions leading to confusion.

Safety Strategy Amid Geopolitical and Socioeconomic Volatility *Continued*

Implication

If companies allow external volatility to compromise safety values or rely on reactive, imprecise communication, they risk serious consequences. Research shows that poor communication and ambiguous instructions contribute to higher injury rates[4]. Employee engagement suffers when workers feel undervalued or excluded from decision-making. Allowing financial pressures to supersede safety can lead to catastrophic incidents that damage the business and harm people. Without a resilient, value-driven safety culture, organizations will struggle to adjust to future crises and may lose talent, productivity, and stakeholder trust.

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The only sustainable way to navigate geopolitical and socioeconomic volatility is to anchor safety strategies in core values. Safety must be treated as a non-negotiable, foundational value rather than a "priority" that can be traded off. Leaders must model this commitment by staying visible, visiting field sites, and reinforcing that safety is integral to business success. Communication should be meaningful and precise, delivered in plain language, in short formats, and tailored to the field, in engaging short "TikTok-style" videos, so workers understand expectations and can respond quickly. Human-centric leadership that empowers employees, encourages honest feedback, and respects diverse perspectives builds trust and resilience. Organizations should also sustain engagement by recognizing employee contributions, involving frontline workers in safety councils, and keeping them at the center of decision-making.

Safety Strategy Amid Geopolitical and Socioeconomic Volatility *Continued*

Recommended Actions

• **Re-affirm safety as a core organizational value** by translating this into policy and governance so safety remains integral to every decision. Avoid compromising on safety anchors, even under financial or political pressure. Make it clear through words and actions that safety is not negotiable, regardless of external circumstances.

  • *Benefit: When safety is embedded as a core value rather than a competing priority, it persists through turbulent times. Employees recognize consistency between stated values and leadership actions, building trust and commitment. This "safety always" mindset ensures decisions consistently protect people and assets, enhancing stakeholder trust and enabling long-term growth even amid uncertainty.*

• **Develop concise, plain language communication frameworks** by replacing long reports with clear bullet points and story-based messages that speak the workforce's language. Encourage two-way dialogue, allowing employees to provide feedback and ask questions. Use engaging formats that match how people actually consume information today.

  • *Benefit: Clear, concise communication cuts through the noise and reduces both ambiguity and incident rates. When workers understand precisely what's expected and feel heard through two-way dialogue, they can respond quickly and appropriately. Story-based messaging makes safety personal and memorable, increasing engagement and compliance.*

Safety Strategy Amid Geopolitical and Socioeconomic Volatility *Continued*

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Recommended Actions

• **Increase leadership presence and storytelling** by regularly visiting worksites, sharing real stories of how safe behaviors saved lives, and acknowledging employee contributions. Visible leadership fosters credibility and demonstrates commitment. Make safety conversations personal and authentic rather than scripted or perfunctory.

  • *Benefit: Visible, authentic leadership presence builds credibility and demonstrates that safety isn't just policy, but it's personal. When leaders share real stories and recognize contributions, employees feel valued and engaged, leading to lower turnover, improved morale, and better safety performance. This human connection sustains culture through challenging times.*

• **Cultivate agility without sacrificing foundations** by utilizing data and early warning indicators to anticipate geopolitical or socioeconomic shifts, adjust procedures quickly, and stay aligned with core values. Share best practices across teams and encourage collaboration to build collective resilience. Remain flexible in tactics while staying firm on principles.

  • *Benefit: Organizations that can sense and respond to external shifts while maintaining their safety foundation build resilience and competitive advantage. This agility enables rapid adaptation to new circumstances without the chaos of constantly shifting priorities. Teams learn to navigate change effectively, building confidence and capability that serve them through future crises.*

EHS Team Alignment, Knowledge Loss, and Skills for Success Through 2030

Situation

EHS teams operate in a landscape that is changing faster than ever. Participants described a feeling of "constant change" driven by rapid technological advancements, evolving regulations, and ongoing business growth. Automation, IoT sensors, and AI are transforming EHS roles: instead of merely reacting to incidents, modern professionals must prevent risks using real-time monitoring and predictive tools. At the same time, many seasoned safety leaders are approaching retirement, threatening to lose decades of tacit knowledge. Research shows that technological disruptions in industries like oil and gas are requiring workers to take on roles that prioritize judgment and problem-solving skills as routine tasks become automated[5]. The challenge is to ensure continuity of expertise, align EHS teams with business objectives, and develop the skills and leadership capacity needed for success in 2030 and beyond.

Complication

The group noted several barriers that hinder EHS alignment and efficacy. Knowledge loss and inconsistent capabilities: Without structured succession planning, the retirement of experienced leaders could erode safety practices. In industries such as oil and gas, losing retiring professionals' knowledge of safety protocols, regulations, and emergency response procedures may lead to compliance failures and safety risks. Inconsistent competencies across locations create uneven experiences for EHS professionals when they visit sites. Technology adoption and trust: Digital tools offer efficiency, but can generate resistance. Leaders discussed AI-enabled platforms that automate job-safety analysis and incident reporting to improve decision-making, yet workers worry about surveillance and how their data will be used. Technology must be introduced with clear rules of engagement and an emphasis on how it will help rather than punish employees. New skills and evolving risks: Manufacturing introduces risks such as cybersecurity threats, human-machine interface errors, and complex system failures. EHS teams must manage both physical and digital hazards, requiring fluency in AI tools, IoT systems, and data analytics. Traditional job descriptions are no longer sufficient; teams need cross-functional expertise and continuous learning to keep pace with automation and remote work. Leadership capacity and alignment: Participants observed that telling frontline supervisors to spend more time in the field without eliminating back-office tasks is unrealistic. Leadership at all levels must be equipped to drive safety, communicate effectively, and connect EHS outcomes to business results. Without clear goals and structured development, leaders revert to a dominant, directive style that discourages engagement.

EHS Team Alignment, Knowledge Loss, and Skills for Success Through 2030 *Continued*

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Implication

If organizations ignore these challenges, they risk losing critical knowledge, struggling to maintain compliance, and falling behind in a digital economy. Poor knowledge transfer and misaligned leadership can lead to inconsistent safety behaviors and increased incidents. Rapid automation requires new competencies, and without upskilling, EHS teams may fail to recognize digital hazards, undermining safety and productivity. Organizations that fail to adopt digital tools will also miss opportunities to free up frontline leaders' time, hindering engagement with workers. The EHS function risks becoming marginalized if it cannot demonstrate a clear connection to business value and strategic objectives.

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The EHS function must proactively reinvent itself to stay relevant and aligned with business objectives. A value-driven, learning-oriented strategy should build structured succession plans that identify critical roles and capture tacit knowledge, and invest in leadership development programs that teach management and communication skills. Research shows that leading EHS efforts requires building leadership buy-in, integrating EHS principles into organizational culture, tying outcomes to business goals[6], and embracing digital technology while addressing human concerns. Remote EHS management tools can maintain high safety standards across dispersed teams through real-time data feeds and automated compliance monitoring. However, these tools must be introduced transparently with worker input to build trust, especially given that only 31% of Americans trust businesses to use AI responsibly[7]. The future of EHS is not just about technical expertise but about influence, communication, and strategic alignment.

EHS Team Alignment, Knowledge Loss, and Skills for Success Through 2030 *Continued*

Recommended Actions

• **Align EHS objectives with organizational strategy and culture** by ensuring leaders provide clear expectations, recognize desired behaviors, and use a mix of leading and lagging indicators to measure performance. Promote transformational leadership behaviors that inspire and motivate employees rather than relying solely on directive approaches. Connect every EHS initiative to broader strategic business goals.

  • *Benefit: When EHS objectives clearly align with organizational strategy, safety becomes a driver of business success rather than a cost center or constraint. Transformational leadership sustains engagement and builds a healthy culture where people want to work safely, not just comply. This strategic, technology-enabled, and people-focused approach builds a resilient culture capable of adapting to continuous change and delivering safer, more efficient operations. This approach also ensures that safety is represented at the executive levels where it counts.*

• **Develop formal succession and knowledge transfer plans** by identifying critical EHS roles and the skills they require, creating documented frameworks that clearly define successors and timelines. Use mentorship, job shadowing, and digital repositories to transfer implicit knowledge. Reverse mentoring and mentorship circles can ensure knowledge flows both ways, with younger professionals sharing digital fluency while learning from experienced leaders.

  • *Benefit: Structured succession planning preserves critical institutional knowledge and ensures leadership continuity, safeguarding both safety performance and regulatory compliance. By capturing tacit knowledge before it walks out the door, organizations protect themselves from dangerous capability gaps. Bi-directional mentoring ensures the organization benefits from both experience and fresh perspectives.*

EHS Team Alignment, Knowledge Loss, and Skills for Success Through 2030 *Continued*

Recommended Actions

• **Invest in leadership development and management training** by providing EHS professionals with training in management disciplines such as goal setting, conflict resolution, risk communication, and business planning. Equip leaders with skills to influence across organizational boundaries, build relationships, and lead transformational change. Help them understand how to translate safety outcomes into business language that resonates with executives.

  • *Benefit: Leadership development enhances decision-making and communication capabilities, enabling safety leaders to tie safety outcomes to business objectives and influence across the organization. When EHS professionals can speak the language of business strategy, they gain a seat at the table for critical decisions. This elevates the function from compliance-focused to strategically essential.*

• **Modernize EHS through digital tools and analytics** by adopting integrated EHS management platforms with real-time incident tracking, compliance monitoring, and AI-enabled predictive analytics. Use mobile-enabled communication tools to streamline reporting and two-way feedback, freeing frontline leaders from paperwork. Consider AI-powered verification tools that process contractor safety reviews faster than manual methods, allowing EHS teams to focus on strategic initiatives. Research shows that workplace injuries cost U.S. businesses over $1 billion each week[8], making predictive tools essential.

  • *Benefit: Digital tools free up significant time for frontline engagement while providing predictive insights that lead to lower incident rates. Automation handles routine compliance tasks, allowing EHS professionals to focus on high-value activities like coaching, culture-building, and strategic risk assessment. Real-time data enables faster, more informed decisions.*

EHS Team Alignment, Knowledge Loss, and Skills for Success Through 2030 *Continued*

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Recommended Actions

• **Upskill teams for the future** by requiring proficiency in digital tools, IoT systems, and data analysis. Provide certifications and continuous training in digital safety management to keep pace with automation. Encourage cross-functional collaboration with IT and engineering teams to address cybersecurity, human-machine interface design, and risk assessments for increasingly complex systems. Organizations in the process industries are implementing internal programs to upskill and reskill employees as technologies such as IoT and AI automate routine tasks[5].

  • *Benefit: Upskilling teams in AI and data analytics empowers them to manage emerging risks that traditional EHS training never addressed. Cross-functional collaboration breaks down silos and ensures safety is embedded in technology design rather than bolted on afterward. Teams become true business partners who can anticipate and address risks in digital transformation initiatives.*

Reframing AI into Actionable Insights

Situation

The world is uncertain about what artificial intelligence will become, and EHS professionals are unsure how to apply it beneficially. While AI promises to revolutionize safety management through predictive capabilities and real-time monitoring, there is confusion about what AI actually is, what it can do, and how to implement it responsibly in EHS contexts.

Complication

Most organizations are only using AI at a low maturity level —ChatGPT, Claude, Copilot — for basic tasks like writing and summarization. Complex data analytics and reporting capabilities are often conflated with AI's predictive power, and many organizations lack the high maturity of their EHS technology infrastructure to support advanced AI applications. There's a gap between the promise of AI and the reality of current organizational capability. Additionally, concerns about surveillance, job displacement, and algorithmic bias create resistance among workers and even safety professionals.

Reframing AI into Actionable Insights *Continued*

Implication

Waiting for a market-ready, turnkey technology solution will leave late adopters (those not reframing AI as Actionable Insights) behind. Organizations that don't begin building AI maturity now will find themselves increasingly unable to compete with those developing predictive capabilities and gaining efficiency through intelligent automation. The window for creating competitive advantage through AI in safety is closing as early adopters pull ahead.

DEKRA PoV

The value and intention of Artificial Intelligence is when we access data to drive insights and forge predictions. Organizations with the highest level of AI maturity are harnessing data to predict the next inflection point in their business and to preskill for agility and resilience. In EHS, multiple data sources should be accessed to create proactivity around incident potential and exposure control. According to recent industry research, AI-driven predictive analytics is transforming EHS management from reactive to preventive approaches, with companies achieving significant reductions in workplace hazards and costs[9]. Some of these data sources move beyond incident-tracking tools and EHS software to AI-driven monitoring systems, such as cab cameras and complex machine guarding. Coupling this data with job site observations, near misses, and incident reports is imperative for optimizing your AI data sources. Upon identifying opportunities to control exposure, including human factors, predictive, top-down governance models should be put in place to provide individuals at all levels with actionable insights. The key is to reframe AI not as "Artificial Intelligence" but as "Actionable Insights," which focuses on the practical value rather than the technology itself.

Reframing AI into Actionable Insights *Continued*

Recommended Actions

• **Gradually introduce AI to your safety management system** by introducing new sources of information beyond traditional incident tracking. Start small with pilot projects that demonstrate value without overwhelming the organization. Focus on use cases where AI can clearly solve existing pain points or answer questions that were previously unanswerable.

  • *Benefit: Gradual introduction drives a sustainable increase in maturity, creating greater change management success and more sound governance around exposure control systems. Starting small allows organizations to build confidence and capability while learning what works in their specific context. This approach minimizes resistance and maximizes learning.*

• **Integrate multiple data sources** , including AI-driven monitoring systems (cab cameras, machine guarding sensors, wearable technology), with traditional data from job site observations, near misses, and incident reports. Create a unified view that enables pattern recognition across previously siloed information streams. AI-powered systems can analyze sensor inputs, environmental factors, and historical safety data to identify risky patterns and provide remedial measures before incidents occur[10].

  • *Benefit: Optimizing AI data sources creates proactivity around incident potential and exposure control that was never possible with single data streams. The integration reveals correlations and leading indicators that remain invisible when data lives in separate systems. This holistic view enables truly predictive safety management. Real-time monitoring and IoT integration allow organizations to collect data and address risks dynamically.*

Reframing AI into Actionable Insights *Continued*

Recommended Actions

• **Implement predictive top-down governance models** that transform data insights into actionable guidance for individuals at all levels of the organization. Create clear protocols for how insights should drive decisions and actions. Ensure that AI recommendations are explainable and that humans remain accountable for final decisions.

  • *Benefit: Actionable insights help leaders map change to individual contribution at all levels, ultimately improving culture. When people understand not just what to do differently but why—based on data-driven predictions—they engage more meaningfully with safety initiatives. This bridges the gap between strategic safety vision and frontline execution, creating alignment and accountability throughout the organization.*

Overall Themes and Takeaways

Across all four discussions, several common themes emerged that organizations must address to build resilient safety cultures:

VALUES-DRIVEN SAFETY

Treating safety as a core value rather than a negotiable priority anchors decisions amid geopolitical turmoil and market pressures. When safety is foundational, it persists through change.

MEANINGFUL, CONCISE COMMUNICATION

Delivered in the workforce's language and amplified through storytelling, this builds trust and encourages engagement with contractors and employees alike. Clear communication cuts through noise and drives understanding.

PREDICTIVE APPROACHES AND DATA-DRIVEN TOOLS

Moving from reactive to predictive risk management using real-time data and AI anticipates hazards before they materialize, freeing up time for human interaction. Prediction beats reaction.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP PRESENCE

Leaders must spend time in the field, listening to the workforce and recognizing that people are central to safety success. Visible, authentic leadership builds credibility and trust.

UPSKILLING AND SUCCESSION PLANNING

Urgent priorities as retirements and automation reshape EHS roles, requiring teams to develop management, communication, and digital skills to remain practical and relevant.

ALIGNMENT BETWEEN EHS AND BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

Requires clear governance, cross-departmental collaboration, and a North Star that persists even in the face of unforeseen events. Strategic alignment elevates safety from a compliance function to a business driver.

By connecting values, communication, predictive tools, engagement, upskilling, and alignment, organizations can build resilient safety cultures capable of thriving through continuous change.

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