



Making Every Job Safe, Every Day

Why Australian Workplaces Must Have Confidence Beyond Compliance



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Methodology

This survey was conducted by PureProfile on behalf of Avetta. It surveyed 518 professionals across Australia who work in high risk industries, such as manufacturing, construction, mining, utilities, and facilities management, amongst others. The survey was conducted in August 2025.



Introduction

A recent research study of Australians working in high risk industries such as manufacturing, construction, mining, utilities, and facilities management reveals critical insights into the current state of workplace health and safety (WHS) in Australia.

Despite operating underneath many layers of regulation, Australian employees in higher-risk sectors may *feel* safe, but the systems protecting them are partial, inconsistent, or, in some cases, absent altogether.

Nine in ten employees report feeling safe most or all of the time. But this sense of safety belies deeper systemic gaps: 56% of respondents admit their companies only have 'some' risk systems in place, with almost one in ten saying no such systems exist at all. A further 6% don't even know whether risk systems exist in their organisation.

The survey findings indicate that while workers feel safe in their day-to-day experience, this sense of security is fundamentally a false one, because the organisational scaffolding meant to protect them is fragile at best.

For leadership teams, this perception gap between workers feeling safe and actually being safe creates a potential legal, financial, and reputational nightmare.

Across Australia, the imperative is also clear when it comes to contractors. They are often tasked with the most dangerous work, and yet, 65% of the survey respondents say they are only 'somewhat confident' or not confident in verifying contractor safety standards before work begins. This problem hides in plain sight: a workforce that is deemed essential, but is persistently under-protected.

Nor is leadership immune from scrutiny. Workers report that they feel their executives rely heavily on compliance frameworks, but the workers themselves are more interested in tangible forms of empowerment, such as more training, better tools, and a safety-first culture. This proves that while regulation is necessary, it can be a toothless tiger without leadership that drives safety culture from the top down.

Finally, the survey revealed the silent risks of organisational blind spots, where known hazards are acknowledged, but not acted upon. Similarly, the survey found employees refrain from reporting concerns out of fear of repercussions or a belief nothing will change. Nearly two in five respondents say they have at some point not reported a safety concern, underscoring a hidden vulnerability in otherwise 'safe' workplaces.

This survey comes at a time of heightened scrutiny for Australian businesses operating in high-risk industries. Whether it's the increased penalties under the Model Work Health and Safety Legislation Amendment (Offences and Penalties) in 2023¹, or the major WHS reforms passed in New South Wales², which expand enforcement powers and extend prosecution windows, these reforms show that Australia is not just tightening compliance expectations, but reshaping what constitutes safe and responsible work at its core.

Key Findings

- 9 in 10 workers feel safe at work most or all of the time, yet 56% say their company only has 'some' risk systems in place. A further 8% say there's none in place, and 6% don't even know if such systems exist at all.
- 46% of respondents said their company should take health and safety 'much more' or 'more' seriously.
- The most popular answers when asked to name what would be effective at increasing health and safety levels in their workplace were: 'more internal training on how to identify and manage risks in the workplace' (42%); 'stronger investment in tools and resources to help identify hazard and risk controls' (29%); and 'upskilling the executive team and board on health and safety issues' (27%).
- 55% believe current health and safety regulations are only 'somewhat effective' at keeping workers safe.
- 19% see risks acknowledged but not acted on daily or weekly; another 17% weekly.
- 65% are only 'somewhat confident' or not confident in verifying contractor safety standards before work begins.



Section One:

Feeling Safe ≠ Being Safe

A mirage of safety: why perception does not equal protection

The survey of Australian workers showed their sense of safety is not necessarily reflective of the strength of the systems in place to protect them. It highlights a concerning gap between how safe employees *feel* when contrasted with the operational realities they work within.

Nine in ten Australian workers say they feel safe most or all of the time. Yet more than half (56%) admit their organisation only has 'some' risk management systems in place. Almost one in ten (8%) say no systems exist at all, and another 6% don't even know if such systems are in place.

So why the disconnect? Workers' sense of safety often stems from routine and familiarity — when tasks feel predictable, and accidents seem rare, people assume their environment is safe. This 'everyday normality bias' creates confidence, even in the absence of robust safety systems. Trust in supervisors and peers can also reinforce the perception that risks are under control, regardless of whether the underlying processes are strong enough to manage them.

This latent safety risk shows that although Australian employees may possess a natural trust in their day-to-day routines, the infrastructure is not actually in place to adequately monitor and mitigate against risks.

Almost one-third of workers (30%) say their company would benefit from better risk assessment tools, and nearly half (46%) believe their company should take safety more seriously.

It seems the workers surveyed might be on the money. Traditionally, most WHS prosecutions in Australia have only been pursued after an incident caused injury or death. More recently, however, several states have seen a rise in 'pure risk' prosecutions³, where breaches of duty are prosecuted even before harm occurs. This demonstrates how regulators are increasingly taking action in cases where risks have been identified, but left unmitigated, even without incident. It's clear, then, that latent risk is no longer tolerated as business-as-usual.

"The findings suggest that this perception gap is not merely a communications issue, but a governance one, too. If employees feel safe while risks remain unmitigated, organisations are vulnerable to 'black swan' events: low-probability, but high-impact failures that can cause severe harm to workers and catastrophic reputational, financial, and legal fallout for leadership."



Luke Boyle, Vice President Operations APAC, Avetta

Elevate accountability with a Chief Health and Safety Officer

Closing the gaps reported in the survey requires bold change, fusing technology and leadership reform. One solution is the formal introduction of dedicated executive roles, such as a Chief Health and Safety Officer (CHSO). A CHSO can ensure clear lines of accountability, establish proper reporting frameworks, and align health and safety priorities with the wider business resilience. It's a practical way of demonstrating that WHS is a board-level priority, rather than a compliance afterthought.

Ways Australian organisations can consider closing the safety gap



Embedding a CHSO into executive leadership for optimal accountability and oversight



Investing in technology for real-time risk monitoring



Conducting independent systems audits



Formalising an alignment of board reporting with WHS performance metrics

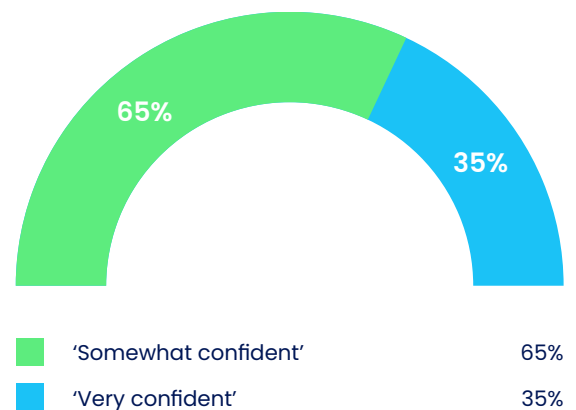
Section Two:

Contractor Safety is a Problem Hiding in Plain Sight

Contractors and subcontractors form the backbone of some of Australia's highest risk industries, such as construction, manufacturing, and mining. In 2023, they made up 7.5% of the total Australian workforce, and some 26% of the construction industry⁴. And yet, they remain one of the least effectively managed WHS cohorts.

Despite the critical role contractors and subcontractors play in so many sectors, the survey results reveal that two-thirds of Australian employees lack full confidence in their organisation's ability to verify contractor standards before work begins. This represents so much more than a minor administrative oversight: it is a structural weakness that creates blind spots, exposing organisations to risks that can result in injury, reputational damage, or even criminal liability.

Q: How confident are you that your organisation can verify contractor safety standards before work begins?



What happens when outsiders become the greatest risk?

When contractors and subcontractors operate without consistent and robust safety standards, the risks quickly become real.

In recent years, high-profile Australian investigations have shown how inadequate contractor management can have knock-on consequences. In *Diona Pty Ltd v SafeWork NSW* [2024]⁵, a subcontractor's worker was seriously injured when entering an exclusion zone and struck by a pipe during pipe-laying works, showing how areas of subcontractor work (even with defined safety plans) can become weak points.

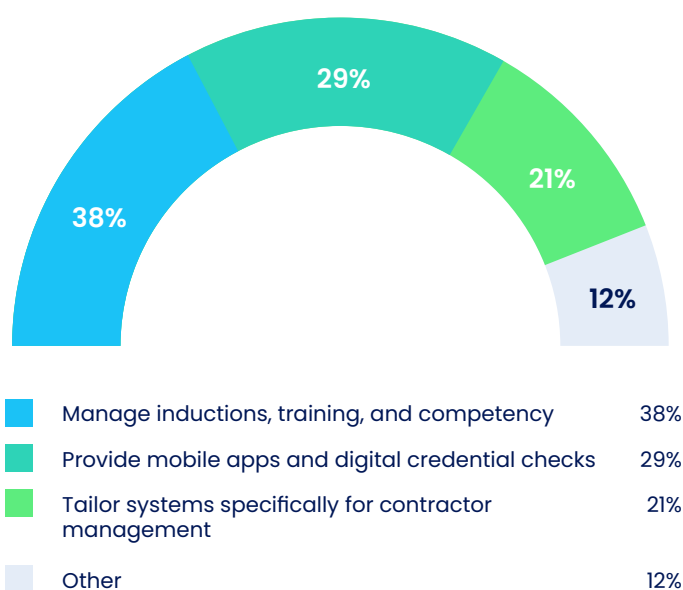
Similarly, at Golden Plains Wind Farm in Victoria in 2024⁶, a sub-contractor was involved in a safety incident lifting a turbine blade, just weeks before a fatality occurred at the same wind farm site. The fact that compliance notices had already been issued (22 notices in the project) underscores how even when regulators are aware of risks, incidents still occur.

These incidents illustrate a consistent pattern: **when contractor safety is treated as peripheral, organisations inherit vulnerabilities that undermine even the strongest internal WHS frameworks**. Principal contractors have an increasing obligation to enforce safety across the subcontractor chain.

The necessity of gaining visibility into every subcontractor

Organisations may have strong internal programs, but without equivalent rigour for contractors and subcontractors, overall workplace safety is compromised. The verification gap cannot be closed with paper records or manual spot checks. It requires technology. Modern subcontractor management platforms provide visibility across the contractor chain, centralising compliance and training in one system to provide a single view. By streamlining onboarding and ensuring consistent standards, they reduce administrative burden, strengthen oversight, and help prevent incidents before they occur.

Q: When asked what kind of health and safety related technology they would like to see adopted across their workforce to increase health and safety standards, the most popular responses were:



Section Three:

WHS Leadership is Driven by Compliance, but Workers are Driven by Culture

The survey findings highlight a clear divergence between leaders and workers on what drives meaningful safety outcomes.

“The research shows leaders tend to favour compliance frameworks such as policies, regulations, and internal processes. Workers, however, are calling for empowerment through training, resources, and safety culture.”



Luke Boyle, Vice President Operations APAC, Avetta



The risk is clear: when leadership relies too heavily on compliance, safety programs can become tokenistic, and only satisfy regulatory requirements without resonating on the ground. Workers want to see safety embedded in their daily experience through training, resources, and a true culture of safety.

Taken together, the findings suggest that while compliance is essential, it is in fact culture that makes safety actionable.

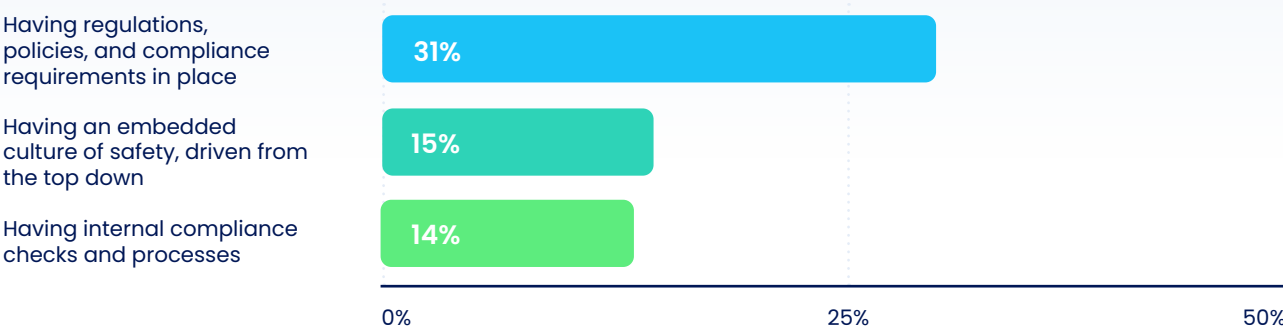
Health and safety technology needs to be accessible enough for workers to complete required training directly from their mobile device. If a contractor arrives on site and discovers a gap in compliance, they needn't be turned away — this can and should be something that can be solved at the gate.

Embedding compliance seamlessly into daily workflows for workers means WHS meets workers where they are. By making the technology accessible enough to embed safety practices into the actual flow of work, and on workers' own devices, safety can be treated as a seamless part of the everyday, instead of a separate, burdensome process.

As Safe Work Australia has highlighted in its cultural change campaigns, safe outcomes are strongest when safety is lived, not just legislated⁷.

Supporting findings

→ When asked to nominate the most effective way to improve health and safety, the top response was ‘having regulations, policies, and compliance requirements in place’ (31%), followed by ‘an embedded culture of safety, driven from the top down’ (15%), and ‘internal compliance checks and processes’ (14%).

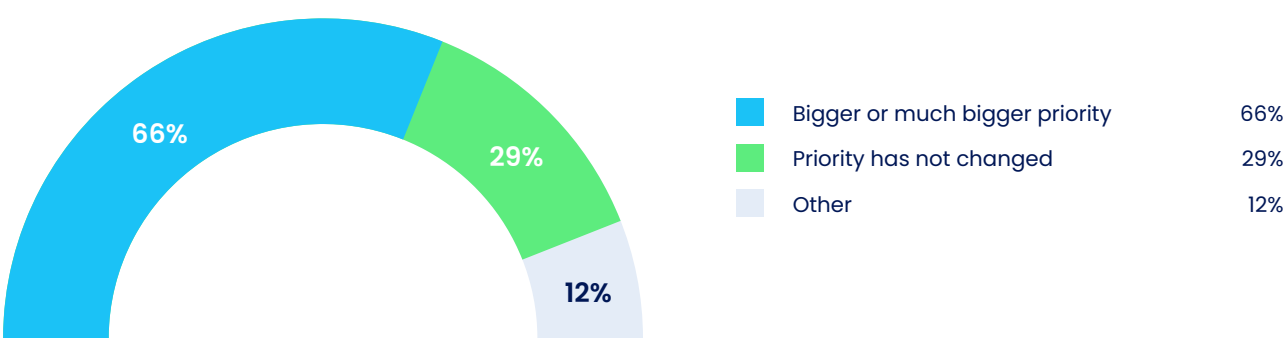


→ Workers identified their most effective drivers of improvement as: more internal training on identifying and managing risks (42%); stronger investment in tools and resources for hazard and risk controls (29%); and upskilling executives and boards on WHS issues (27%).



→ One-third of respondents believe WHS has not become a higher priority for leaders in the past five years, although 61% say it has become a ‘bigger’ or ‘much bigger’ priority.

→ A similar trend exists among workers: 66% believe safety has become a ‘bigger’ or ‘much bigger’ priority on the ground, while 29% believe it has not changed.



Section Four:

The Silent Risks of Reporting Gaps and Organisational Blind Spots

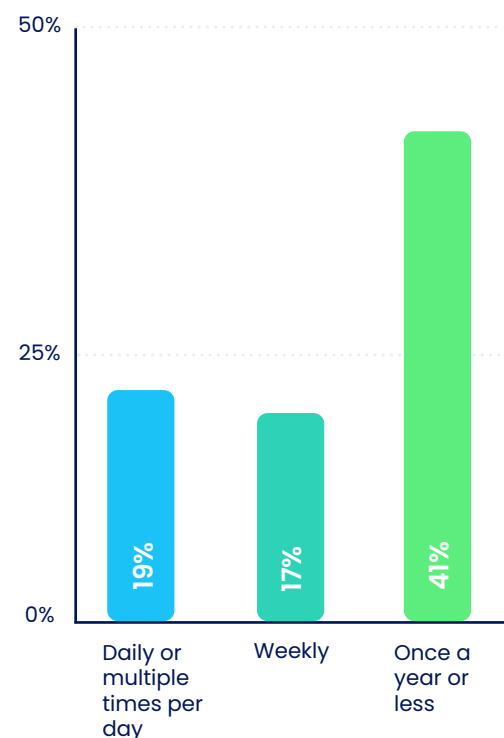
A significant and often overlooked risk in Australian workplaces is not simply the hazards themselves, but the organisational structures that allow them to persist unseen or unaddressed. The survey results highlight a troubling reality: employees frequently notice risks that are raised to management but remain unacted upon. Meanwhile, other workers are discouraged from reporting at all due to fear of repercussions, perceptions of futility, or slow escalation channels.

This creates a structural silence that undermines even the strongest compliance programs, allowing hazards to persist, and magnifying the potential for serious incidents.

The research findings suggest that while some organisations have the right safety programs on paper, blind spots in reporting and escalation create hidden vulnerabilities.

What Australian workers said about the gap between safety silence and safety action

- Almost one in five (19%) respondents notice risks being acknowledged by management but not acted upon daily or multiple times per day; a further 17% notice this weekly. For 41%, such occurrences happen only once per year or less, indicating inconsistent practices across organisations.
- More than a third (38%) of employees have not reported or escalated a safety concern, most commonly because they were worried about repercussions or felt it would be a waste of time.
- When asked why safety risks are not addressed, 12% cited insufficient time, 12% cited low urgency, and 12% cited inefficient escalation.
- Only 45% have consistently reported concerns, while 21% say they have never encountered a problem worth reporting.



The research findings suggest that while some organisations have the right safety programs on paper, blind spots in reporting and escalation create hidden vulnerabilities.

True proactivity requires not only the identification of risks, but also a robust process for actioning them: one that is transparent, responsive, and trusted by employees. Technology can play a critical role in this reporting revolution by simplifying submission, tracking, and resolution, ensuring that no risk remains unaddressed while waiting in the queue.

The survey results make clear that reporting gaps are not minor issues — they are a structural vulnerability. Addressing these blind spots with both cultural change and enabling technology is essential for creating a genuinely proactive and safe workplace.

Addressing reporting gaps to strengthen WHS

Challenge	Outcome	Solution
Reporting gaps allow hazards to persist unnoticed or unaddressed	Latent risks escalate, increasing likelihood of incidents and regulatory exposure	Simplify submission channels via digital tools; provide real-time tracking of escalations
Fear of repercussions or perceptions of futility discourage reporting	Employees withhold vital safety information, and organisational blind spots grow, leading to hazards being ignored or deprioritised	Communicate that reports are valued and acted upon
Inconsistent leadership response undermines trust in safety programs	Safety culture weakens. Box-ticking, tokenistic compliance replaces an encouragement of proactive safety behaviours	Train leadership to respond promptly and visibly. Provide feedback on actions taken, giving employees a chance to provide feedback too

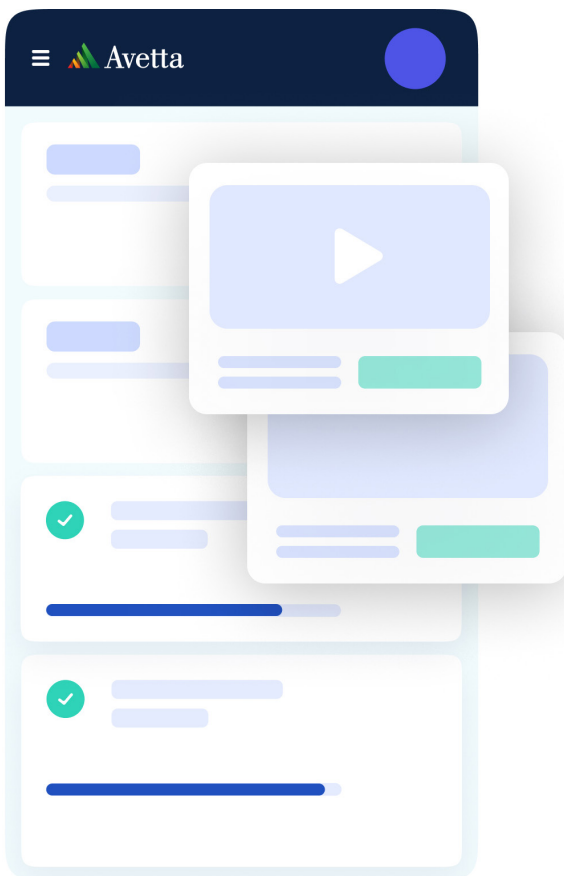
Conclusion

Australian workers may feel safe, but, as this report has shown, that perception of safety is often an illusion: a system built on partial completion, inconsistent compliance, and cultural or reporting blind spots. True workplace resilience requires a more holistic approach, which can and should be achieved by empowering workers with training and tools, embedding cultural leadership, strengthening reporting channels to ensure no risk goes unaddressed, and closing the contractor verification gaps that leave sites vulnerable.

Making Every Job Safe, Every Day. Why Australian Workplaces Must Have Confidence Beyond Compliance demonstrates that feeling safe is not the same as being safe. Closing the gaps between perception and reality, leadership and workforce, and policy and practice is essential to prevent hidden risks from manifesting into serious incidents.

Technology provides the lever to turn these insights into action, enabling organisations to embed compliance into daily workflows, increase transparency, and foster a culture where safety is lived, not just legislated.

With Avetta, organisations can confidently move beyond 'safe enough,' to a state of competency and accountability that covers every worker, contractor, and site. This will ensure that perception aligns with protection, and that every risk is managed before it becomes an incident.



Avetta addresses these challenges head on

Avetta empowers Australian companies to move beyond compliance-driven approaches and embed culture-driven resilience at every level.

Its technology solutions tackle the divides identified in this report by providing real-time verification of contractor safety standards, digitising and streamlining training, inductions, and competency management, and enabling faster, more transparent risk escalation and reporting.

By providing visibility across the entire workforce and supply chain, organisations can:

- Verify contractor safety standards in real time.
- Digitise and deliver training, inductions, and competency management.
- Streamline risk escalation and reporting.
- Provide visibility across the entire supply chain.

References

¹**Source: Model Work Health and Safety Legislation Amendment (Offences and Penalties);** <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/model-work-health-and-safety-legislation-amendment-offences-and-penalties-2023>

²**Source: the major WHS reforms passed in New South Wales, which expand enforcement powers and extend prosecution windows;** <https://www.nsw.gov.au/ministerial-releases/minns-labor-government-passes-major-reforms-to-protect-workers>

³**Source: 'pure risk' prosecutions;** https://law.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/4960832/CELR-Seminar-21-May.pdf

⁴**Source: In 2023, they made up 7.5% of the total Australian workforce, and some 26% of the construction industry;** https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_departments/Parliamentary_Library/Research/Research_Papers/2023-24/LabourHireContractWork#:~:text=In%20the%2012%20months%20to,278%2C100%20or%20a%2026.5%25%20share.

⁵**Source: Diona Pty Ltd v SafeWork NSW [2024];** <https://addisons.com/article/who-is-liable-for-whs-injuries-on-construction-sites/>

⁶**Source: Golden Plains Wind Farm in Victoria in 2024;** <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-11-20/safety-incident-on-golden-plains-wind-farm-before-fatality/104625902>

⁷**Source: safe outcomes are strongest when safety is lived, not just legislated;** <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/safety-topic/managing-health-and-safety/leadership-and-culture>

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