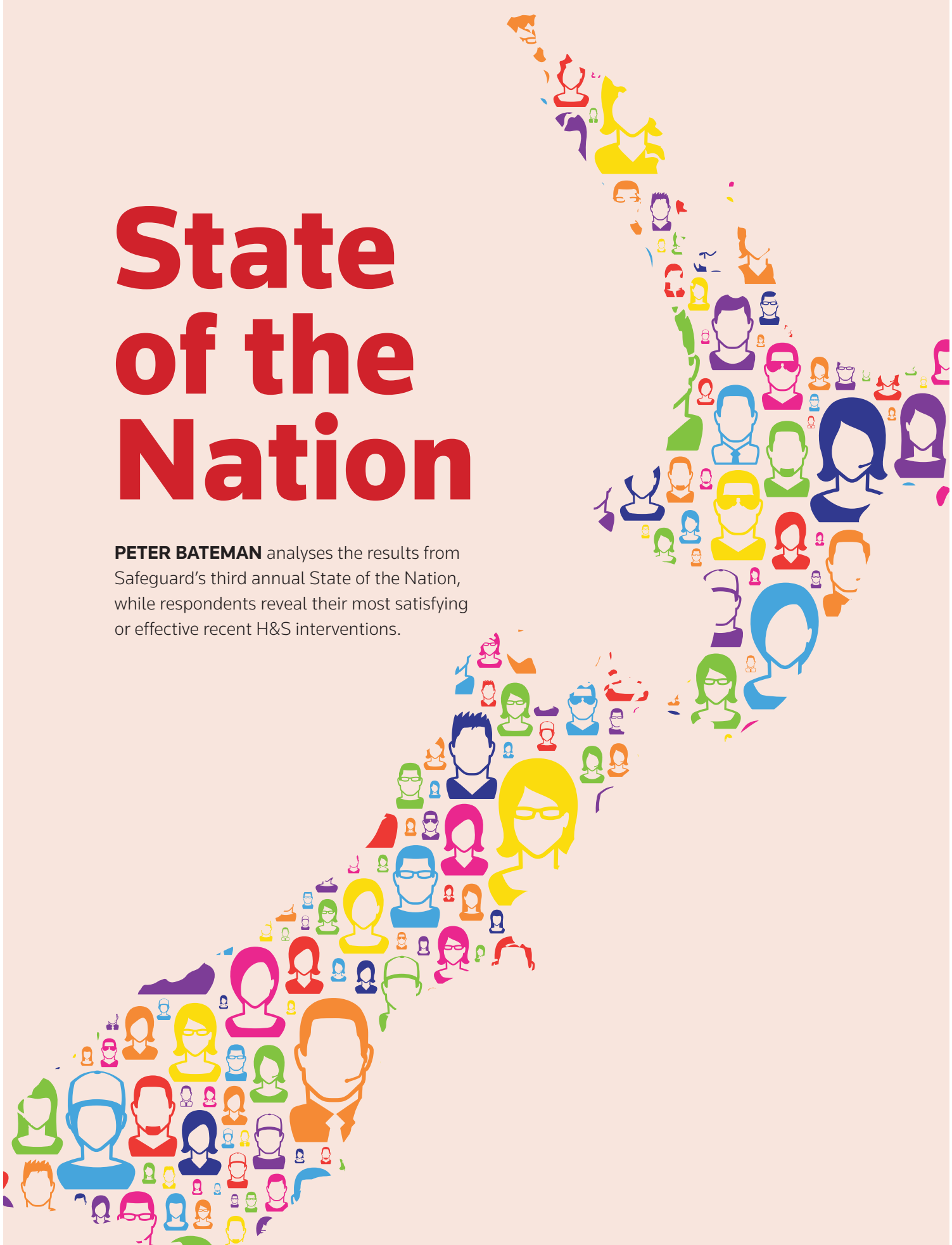


State of the Nation

PETER BATEMAN analyses the results from Safeguard's third annual State of the Nation, while respondents reveal their most satisfying or effective recent H&S interventions.



As always when taking the pulse, the first objective is to determine the patient is still alive. With just over 900 responses – the most so far – we can at least declare there is a healthy number of people willing to state their view on how things are going on the health and safety front, both nationally and in their own workplace (or, in the case of consultants, in those of their clients).

Our thanks to all who took part, and in particular to those membership bodies who made their channels available to ensure the widest possible input. We really appreciate it.

As always, the survey is anonymous and is restricted to three categories of respondent, who all answer the same set of questions. The categories are:

- H&S practitioners (including occupational health nurses);
- H&S representatives; and
- Business owners/senior executives.

Taken overall, the results are remarkably similar to last year's survey. That is as it should be – wild variations year on year would be confusing and would call into question the validity of the results.

We have aggregated the percentage of those who responded to questions with “Strongly Agree” and “Agree”, as per the table over the page. Comparing this year with last year's survey, six questions show a variation of three or more percentage points. WorkSafe will be pleased to see 63.8% of respondents think the regulator is performing well, a rise of just over 3%. And while there is a small dip in the follow-up question – about people's recent personal experience with WorkSafe – it is interesting that collectively, and in the various groups, people rate their personal experience with people from WorkSafe higher than they do the agency's overall performance.

(Disclosure: we have fixed an error that appeared in our reports on the previous two surveys regarding this second WorkSafe question. Earlier, we omitted to remove from the calculations those who answered “I have not had any contact with WorkSafe in the last 12 months”. We have now removed them and the table reflects the corrected results for all three years.)

There's been a nearly five point fall in those who think H&S has improved at their own workplace in the last 12 months; however the figure is still more than 78%.

More worrying perhaps is that the last three questions, which deal with how H&S is discussed within an organisation and with business partners, all show a decline of around five points.

But taken overall, the most striking response is one of the most consistent: that health and wellbeing is taken so much less seriously than safety: 50% to 80%. This remains our greatest collective challenge.

GROUP DIFFERENCES

Practitioners are notably gloomy on health, with only 40% saying it is taken seriously. They also take (again) a much dimmer view of the competence of, well, themselves, with only 53% regarding H&S professionals as mostly competent. Reps and business have a much sunnier view on this.

Practitioners are similarly gloomy on the prospects of someone being harmed or made unwell at their workplace, with only 38% confident it won't happen, while the other two groups are comfortably over 50%.

For their part, H&S reps have dipped five percentage points over the last year in their belief that H&S has improved at their workplace (78.8% to 73.8%); this could be related to the nearly ten-point drop in those who said staff are regularly consulted on H&S (81.7% down to 71.9%).

As in previous years, business owners/senior execs are generally more positive on most questions. However, those who believe health and wellbeing is taken seriously have declined by nearly ten points (from 65.3% to 55.6%), which, to take an optimistic reading, perhaps reflects an awakening regarding the scale of the problem.

As a group they are also happier with WorkSafe (up from 55.4% to 60.7%). They respond with 94% scores on the two questions about worker involvement in H&S, which is terrific until you look at the H&S rep scores on the same questions,

which are 15 percentage points lower. Something of a clash between work-as-fondly-imagined and work-as-done?

REGIONS AND SECTORS

Analysed by region, Auckland, Wellington and Canterbury each provided more than 100 responses to make a comparison exercise worthwhile. There was only one difference of any significance: Auckland respondents (77.1%) were notably less sure that H&S in NZ is improving (Wellington 85.8%, Canterbury 89.3%).

Analysed by industry sector, Construction, Healthcare, Government, Manufacturing and Transport all provided 100+ responses. Last year's gloom among Government and Healthcare respondents has lifted, with Government (84.1%) a good five to ten points ahead of the others on whether safety is taken seriously.

Construction was particularly down on health & wellbeing (38.1%), and on respondents' personal recent experience with WorkSafe (63.0%). Only Manufacturing (62.2%) rated its regulatory dealings so low; the other sectors were ten to 15 points higher.

SIZE OF BUSINESS

Analysed by organisation size there wasn't much in it, except that in the 500+ category a noticeably low 29.1% were confident no one would be hurt or made ill at their workplace. (Not too surprising, given that with more people there are more opportunities to be hurt.)

Similarly, the 500+ group was particularly gloomy on health & wellbeing (39.3%).

BIGGEST CHALLENGES

Respondents were presented with nine options and asked to select only one as their biggest H&S challenge over the next 12 months. As in 2017 and 2016, culture (21.3%) and dealing with contractors/other PCBUs (18.4%) were the top markers, though both were down a few points from last year. Coming third – and well up from last year – was dealing with health risk exposures (16.3%, compared to only 9.2% last year). That's promising!

State of the Nation 2018

QUESTION	% WHO AGREE OR STRONGLY AGREE						
	2016 – all (N=786)	2017 – all (N=776)	2018 – all (N=905)	Difference from 2017	2018 – practitioners (N=462)	2018 – reps (N=324)	2018 – business owners/execs (N=119)
In NZ the safety of workers is taken seriously	67.1	77.7	79.6	1.9	74.9	83.6	87.2
In NZ the health & wellbeing of workers is taken seriously	42.5	48.1	50.1	2.0	39.9	62.7	55.6
NZ's H&S performance is improving	78.2	82.0	83.4	1.4	80.8	85.1	88.9
The H&S regulator WorkSafe NZ is performing well	56.7	60.5	63.8	3.3	62.8	66.5	60.7
In the last 12 months my experience with WorkSafe has been satisfactory	68.2	72.4	70.7	-1.4	59.5	53.1	70.4
Organisations in NZ view H&S as an opportunity to improve, not just comply	40.3	45.6	43.1	-2.5	33.3	53.5	53.0
An organisation that manages H&S well is more likely to be successful	91.9	94.3	91.0	-3.3	93.6	87.7	89.7
In my experience most H&S professionals are competent	63.3	60.8	63.3	2.5	53.3	76.3	66.7
H&S has improved at my workplace over the last 12 months	78.2	83.0	78.2	-4.8	79.2	73.8	86.2
In my workplace workers are involved in identifying risks and making decisions about how to control them	81.9	86.0	83.6	-2.4	80.6	84.1	94.0
In my workplace when a worker raises a H&S issue his or her views are heard by management	83.1	86.0	83.1	-2.9	79.7	83.8	94.0
I am confident no one at my workplace will be harmed or made unwell as a result of activities in my workplace	44.7	47.3	46.7	-0.6	38.4	56.3	52.6
In my workplace staff are regularly asked for input into how H&S is managed	75.3	80.3	75.8	-4.5	75.6	71.9	87.1
In my workplace senior managers and/or board members regularly ask questions about H&S	70.9	77.3	72.1	-5.2	73.1	65.4	86.2
In my workplace we discuss H&S risk with other businesses which share our site	62.9	72.2	67.3	-4.9	70.2	58.9	78.5

Q: Over the last year, what was the single most effective or satisfying thing you did in health & safety?

An edited selection of replies from survey respondents.

H&S REPS

Starting the process to issue a PIN notice. Communicating the issues has been positive.

Told the boss that remaining at work in the recent very high temperatures wasn't setting a good example.

Helped put together a formal safety case to present to WorkSafe.

Issued two PINs, as the managers ignored the poor culture which condoned bullying. In fact, the managers ARE the bullies. I have now been singled out and not protected when I reported unreasonable behaviour.

Taking deep dives to deal with risk profiles in H&S committees at local and national level.

Supported my manager to take a decision which reduced the risk of harm to me and my colleagues.

Brainstormed wellbeing risks in workshops to shift organisational thinking to encompass wellbeing, as well as traditional field-based safety.

Getting airconditioning into rooms that were very uncomfortable to work in.

Had hazards removed that could have – would have – caused harm to children.

Being part of a national H&S reps group able to tell leadership of concerns from the ground level of service.

Improved perceptions of H&S in my work area. It's now the norm to discuss H&S.

Improved lockout-tagout systems on site, with new LOTO procedures.

Made sure all hazardous chemicals in the store have GHS label.

Stood up against unsafe procedures arising due to commercial pressures.

Proud to be the one people come to with their concerns.

BUSINESS OWNERS/SENIOR EXECUTIVES

Stopped talking about safety so much and started talking more about improving work, which connected far more with our staff.

No worker was killed or permanently injured! (We are a high hazard industry.)

Launched our health and wellbeing committee.

Visiting guys as they work on site and casually discussing safety.

Revising our safe work methods, with staff writing them themselves for peer review.

Convinced a company they need to address health and wellness, and they actually did something. The rest of the time this is an uphill battle.

Working with other business owners in our town. We get together and share info.

Separating forklift operations from pedestrians.

Isolated many hazards rather than relying on procedures and PPE. All worker-identified and driven.

Learning about critical risk and leading staff through the process of how to fail safely – in our business, a combination of controls and cultural awareness.

Reduced manual handling by 80% using safety-in-design for a new facility.

Saw staff react incredibly well to a serious incident. They took all the right steps as they were trained, so the injured contractor got the help they needed on time, the scene was preserved, children were shielded from view, and management contacted.

Spoke personally to thank employees who have taken the courageous decision to stop a job or activity because they feel it is unsafe. We have encouraged this for a long time but it is rewarding to see people empowered to actually do it. I phone them to reassure them they have made the correct call and that they have my thanks and support.

Abused the H&S officers for being useless and incompetent and enforcing stupid compliance regulations.

H&S PRACTITIONERS

Completed a quantitative respiratory fit programme for all at-risk employees. Only half had the correct RPE.

Established a robust fatal risk programme.

Working with H&S reps to promote high engagement using risk assessments as the foundation tool.

Commenced my career as a H&S practitioner!

Built up our worker engagement, participation and representation practices. The positive flow-on effect on the general business is massive.

Working for a company who wants to change the way safety is done and being part of a team supporting me to make it happen. Why do H&S people change roles so often? Because it's a lonely and often isolated role and still seen within companies as the enemy.

I regularly audit contractors for our clients. Compared to this time last year they've come a long way, which is satisfying.

Developed a H&S management system with headings in te reo (alongside English) to help engage all people in an iwi-owned company. A big learning for me, and rewarding.

Hearing people talk about safety and proactively fix an issue rather than waiting for something to happen.

Listened to a worker tell me about a risk and how to manage it, and share that with his colleagues. Six months ago this sense of ownership and pride wasn't there.

Saved a woman from being crushed by an elevated load lifted by a forklift. I had installed a no-go area within a forklift's three-metre 'zone of safety'. She remembered the rule and moved back seconds before the load fell. [Editor: great, but surely there's a better way than relying on memory?]

I witnessed the beginning of the end of ACC's WSMP incentive.

Got in front of the leadership team and board to give them training and ongoing communications to help them make H&S part of their toolkit.

Took a personal stand by stepping down from a national H&S role that was allocated only eight hours a week! The board needs to provide more

resources and ask more questions to assure itself about what is happening in the regions.

Welfare response to critical incidents was tailored to better meet the needs of those most affected, in the workplace and the immediate family.

Spent more time on site conducting one on one training with project managers and foremen. Allowed me greater understanding of their roles and the challenges they face.

Developed a Permit to Dig which empowers staff to question management if they don't have all the details.

Stopped unsafe work on a large Auckland construction site.

Ensured air sampling was completed, all workers had properly fitted respirators and were health monitored. At two high-risk workplaces.

Fired the H&S consultant.

Moved from a corporate that focused on KPIs and statistics rather than the people at the coalface.

Integrated H&S with wellbeing so we have one message, one direction, one strategy.

Empowered two H&S reps to present on mental health.

Replaced the old, stale EHS committee with a new group of 11, mainly workers, who are keen to be leaders in H&S among their peers.

Did H&S observations on a large project where, given deficiencies in compliance, observation was the only way to prevent a serious harm accident. I stayed because I wouldn't have forgiven myself if something had happened.

Instead of telling clients what they should do, I encouraged them to reach their own conclusions about what could be done to solve issues and develop strategies.

Developed a pictogram of the steps required to correctly perform an electrical isolation, which the primary contractor owns. (We are the main contractor so we have to own the issue – yet NZ-wide it seems to be the electrical contractor's job.)

Identified our critical risks, including our health risks.