



## Health & safety viewed as improving, one year after new legislation

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One year after new health and safety legislation came into force a survey of nearly 800 people has found optimism that New Zealand's engagement with health & safety has improved over that period.

The Health and Safety at Work Act came into force on 4 April 2016, a year ago tomorrow. The legislation was one of the direct outcomes of enquiries into the Pike River mine explosion in 2010.

Safeguard magazine's second annual State of the Nation survey shows 78% of respondents believe health and safety is taken seriously, a double-digit increase from the 67% who felt the same way last year.

The other big lift is directly supportive of the new legislation, in that 72% of respondents agree that in their workplace, risks are discussed with other businesses which share the same site. This is a key element of the new Act. (Last year's figure was 63%.)

The State of the Nation survey used business and union channels, and Safeguard's own networks, to invite three types of respondent to take part: health & safety practitioners, health & safety representatives (workers who are elected by their peers), and business owners/senior executives.

Responses to almost all the 15 questions showed improvement from last year, but three areas of concern have been highlighted. Only 48% of respondents felt confident that the *health* of workers is taken seriously (compared to 78% who were confident about *safety*); and only 46% felt that organisations view health & safety as an opportunity to improve rather than just to comply with the law.

Perhaps most tellingly, only 47% of respondents were confident that no one would be harmed or made unwell by the activities carried out at their workplace.

WorkSafe New Zealand, the health & safety regulator, has come out fairly well in the survey, with 61% of respondents saying it is performing well, and that their personal dealings with the agency have been satisfactory. This is around 5 percentage points up from last year.

The only question which saw sentiment decline slightly related to the competence of health & safety professionals. Ironically, among the three groups of respondents, it was health & safety practitioners themselves who were least confident of the competence of their peers (55% of them had confidence, compared to 75% of reps and 62% of business owners/execs).

Peter Bateman, editor of Safeguard, says that when analysed by industry sector it is clear that people in healthcare are least optimistic. "There was more than a ten percentage point difference in their views on whether health & safety is improving, and that workers' views are heard by management or are sought in the first place.

"Given this sector employs thousands, and research shows there is a link between healthcare worker safety and patient safety, it shows DHBs have a challenge ahead of them."

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**Notes for media**

There were 776 respondents to this year's survey: 463 H&S practitioners, 188 H&S reps, and 125 business owners/executives.

There were 69 respondents from the healthcare sector.

A complete table of results is available on request from the Safeguard editor.

Started in 1988, Safeguard magazine is New Zealand's leading publication on the management of workplace health and safety. It is published by Thomson Reuters.

Safeguard also runs the annual Safeguard National Health & Safety Conference (since 2007), New Zealand's largest; and the annual New Zealand Workplace Health & Safety Awards (since 2005). This year these two events occur in Auckland on 31 May and 1 June.

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