



IN-DEPTH RESEARCH REPORT

# WORKPLACE SAFETY TRAINING:

CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS



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# INTRODUCTION

Workplace safety training plays a vital role in ensuring the well-being and protection of employees from potential hazards in the workplace. Comprehensive safety training programs can equip workers with the necessary information and skills to identify hazards and mitigate potential dangers. Training programs may cover a wide range of topics, including emergency procedures, hazard recognition, proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE), and safe work practices.

By investing in workplace safety training, companies not only prioritize the health and safety of their employees but also create a culture of safety awareness and compliance. This, in turn, leads to a more productive and efficient work environment, reducing the likelihood of accidents and injuries.

In August 2023, the J. J. Keller Center for Market Insights conducted the Workplace Safety Training Pulse Poll of safety professionals who have training responsibilities. The survey's purpose was to better understand employers' challenges around workplace safety training, including:

- ▶ Top problems in conducting safety training
- ▶ What kind of training workers prefer
- ▶ The effectiveness of refresher training
- ▶ How companies measure training effectiveness

The poll results showed clearly that participants know the importance of safety training and the benefits of refresher training and follow-up evaluations. But our research also uncovered that there are challenges around scheduling times for training and worker engagement and participation.





## FINDINGS

WE SURVEYED PEOPLE WHO WERE INVOLVED IN THE COORDINATION, PLANNING, AND PRESENTATION OF WORKPLACE SAFETY TRAINING AT THEIR ORGANIZATION AND FOUND:

- 1. CONFLICTING SCHEDULES ARE THE TOP TRAINING CHALLENGE.**
- 2. LACK OF WORKER ENGAGEMENT/ PARTICIPATION IS A CONCERN.**
- 3. WORKERS PREFER A COMBINATION OF CLASSROOM, ONLINE, AND HANDS-ON TRAINING.**
- 4. REFRESHER TRAINING IS SOMEWHAT OR VERY EFFECTIVE.**
- 5. COMPANIES MEASURE TRAINING EFFECTIVENESS IN VARIOUS WAYS.**

### WHO DID WE ASK?

The Pulse Poll survey was conducted from

**August 21 to  
August 29, 2023.**

**404**  
**PEOPLE**

completed the survey.

**333** people continued with the survey past the qualifier question:

“Are you involved in the coordination, planning, AND presentation of workplace safety training at your organization?”

Over **1/2** of participants were involved in the coordination, planning, AND presentation of workplace safety training at their organization.

## TAKEAWAY 1:

# CONFLICTING SCHEDULES ARE THE TOP TRAINING CHALLENGE.



The biggest problem in conducting safety training is conflicting schedules, according to 57 percent of survey participants.

A look at how safety training was conducted revealed 60 percent of participants trained workers during normal shift hours, with their training most often determined by job tasks and responsibilities. Other participants said training requirements were determined by department or by hazard exposures, while still others required all employees to receive all training offered by the company.

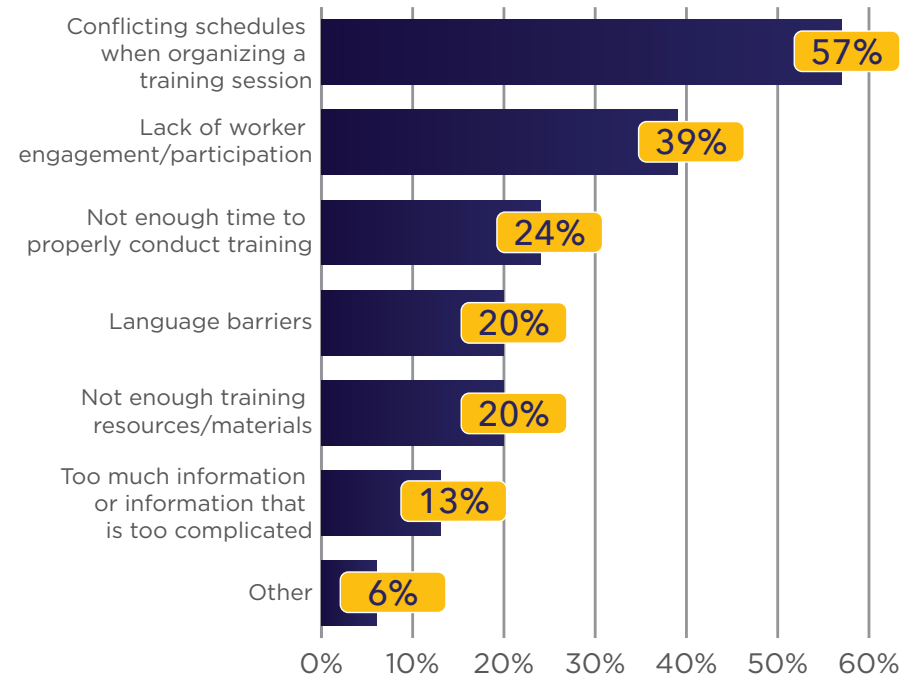
*“It is difficult to schedule training around everyone’s work schedules.”*



Survey Participant



## PROBLEMS IN CONDUCTING SAFETY TRAINING



n=333

## EXPERT TIP

### TAKEAWAY 1: CONFLICTING SCHEDULES ARE THE TOP TRAINING CHALLENGE.



Building training time into an already busy workday can be a challenge. But consider this: Are you training too many employees? While more than 70 general industry OSHA regulations have training or information requirements, training on a particular topic depends on whether it applies to work your employees are performing. All employees must understand how to report an injury or illness and know what to do in an emergency such as a fire or tornado. From there, it's likely that not all OSHA training requirements apply to all employees. For example, the Hazard Communication Standard applies to employees who are exposed to hazardous chemicals in the course of their work. If this doesn't apply to work your employees are performing, you don't need to train on this topic.

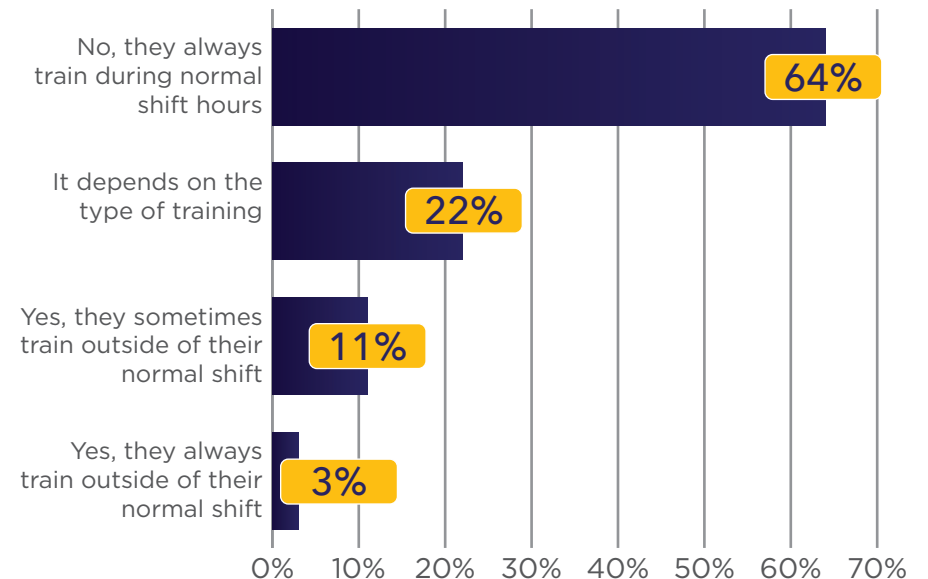
It may not be necessary to repeat your entire training program each year. A look at the individual regulation will tell you if training must be conducted annually and whether the entire program must be repeated. If this isn't the case, you may opt to provide a toolbox talk or microlearning (3 to 5 minutes) on a particular topic instead.

*"We tend to prefer courses that drivers do on their own time, but we have them log that time to pay them for it. It's nice to have them able to do it when they're able."*

Survey Participant



### DO WORKERS COMPLETE SAFETY TRAINING ON THEIR OWN TIME?



n=321

## TAKEAWAY 2:

# LACK OF WORKER ENGAGEMENT/PARTICIPATION IS A CONCERN.

Lack of worker engagement may stem from a variety of reasons. The vast majority of participants polled (70 percent) said workers don't feel the training is important, followed by workers feeling pressured to keep up with operations and not having time for training.

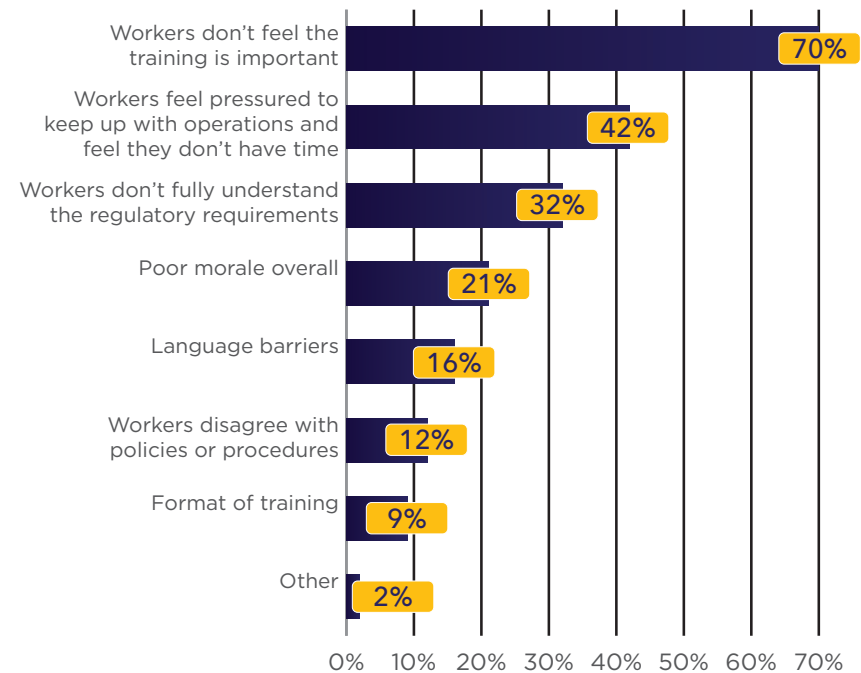
Making the material relatable and providing action items that workers can apply on the job can better keep everyone engaged throughout the training. And they'll be more likely to remember the information.

*"We use examples from the past year from our actual plant to teach certain safety issues."*

Survey Participant



## REASONS FOR LACK OF WORKER ENGAGEMENT/PARTICIPATION



n=131

## EXPERT TIP

### TAKEAWAY 2: LACK OF WORKER ENGAGEMENT/ PARTICIPATION IS A CONCERN.



**What's in it for me?** People attend seminars on topics like “how to get rich” because they're hoping to get something out of it. We train employees to help them avoid hazards. But if training doesn't deliver something that they view as a positive outcome, they won't see the value. Show them the benefits of safety. How would their life change if they lost their hearing? Got caught in a machine? Suffered chemical burns? What would life be like for their families? Remind workers that safety rules keep them safe.

**Make it interactive.** As an example, you and your trainees may look at identifying potential hazards in your workplace. This doesn't have to be an actual walkaround but could be a slide showing something like a blocked fire exit. You may ask “what if?” questions about that blocked exit - “What if” a fire broke out? “What if” there was an active shooter? Evaluate what could go wrong and how injuries could happen. The goal is to prevent those “what if” situations from becoming “what happened” accident investigations. This allows you to show employees WHY safety matters and should help them make a personal connection. For example, you can point out why a blocked fire exit is a violation and how it could cost lives during an emergency. This helps make safety “real” by giving them real-world situations, so that safety isn't just hypothetical.



*“The best safety training is where employees can see, feel, and understand how regulations and company rules can help them in the job to keep them safe and injury free.”*

Survey Participant



## TAKEAWAY 3:

# WORKERS PREFER A COMBINATION OF CLASSROOM, ONLINE, AND HANDS-ON TRAINING.

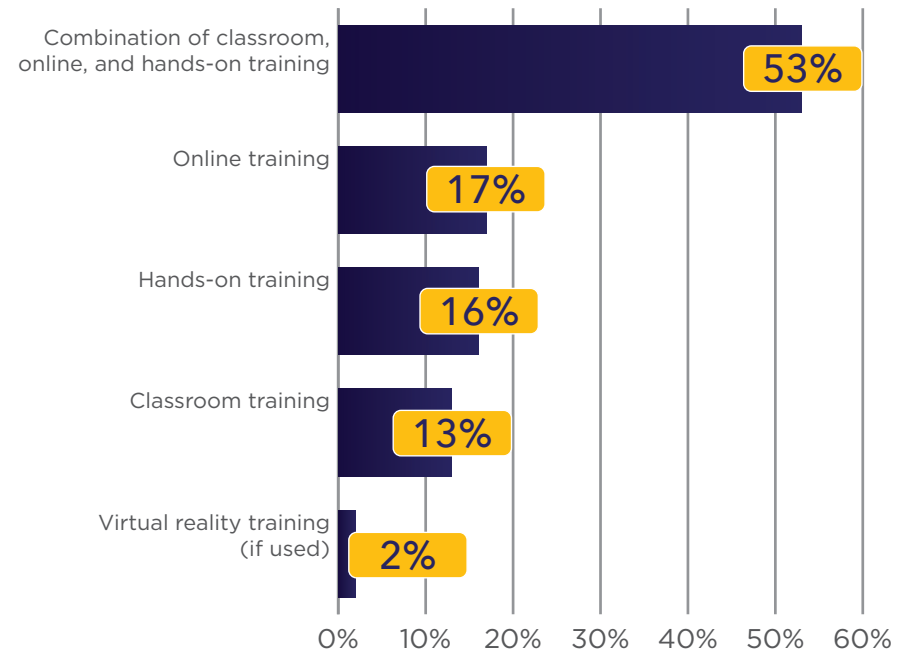


Over half of survey participants stated that workers prefer a combination of classroom, online, and hands-on training. Adults learn in different ways, so a combination of training styles can help employees retain information. In fact, statistics show that we retain about 10 percent of what we see, 30 to 40 percent of what we see and hear, and about 90 percent of what we see, hear, and do.

In a letter of interpretation, OSHA says, “The use of online training by itself is not sufficient to satisfy OSHA training requirements unless that training contains interactive and hands-on components. To be effective, training must result in mastery of the training material (such as, for example, safe work practices or the safe and appropriate use of tools and personal protective equipment). Online training without interactive and hands-on components would not meet this goal.”



## WORKERS' PREFERRED SAFETY TRAINING METHOD



n=316



## EXPERT TIP

### TAKEAWAY 3: WORKERS PREFER A COMBINATION OF CLASSROOM, ONLINE, AND HANDS-ON TRAINING.



A combination of classroom, online, and hands-on training can help hold employees' attention. One of the principles of adult learning is that adults need to "try on" and practice what they're learning. They'll retain more information when they use and practice their knowledge and skills in class.

Hands-on training allows employees to interact with equipment and tools in the presence of a qualified trainer, allows them to learn or refresh their skills through experience, and allows the trainer to assess whether the trainees have mastered the proper techniques. As an example, if you're training on personal protective equipment (PPE) allow trainees to put on and take off each type of PPE to get the feel of it and to help understand its limitations.



*"Training should be frequent and topical. In-person has proven to be more effective than video because it allows more freedom for participants to bring up questions and allows instructors to fully engage every participant."*

Survey Participant



## TAKEAWAY 4:

# REFRESHER TRAINING IS SOMEWHAT OR VERY EFFECTIVE.



When it comes to refresher training, 77 percent of those polled felt it was somewhat or very effective in helping employees absorb the information. Some, but not all, OSHA regulations have refresher training requirements. However, if employees were trained more than a couple years ago, it's worth going back and doing some refresher training.

From a safety perspective, remember this: If employees can't answer questions from an OSHA inspector, your company can be cited for lack of training, even if you have documentation showing that the employee attended training.

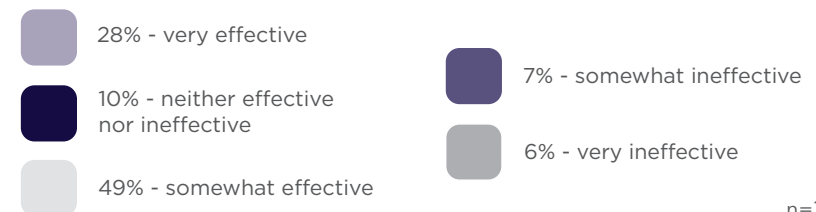
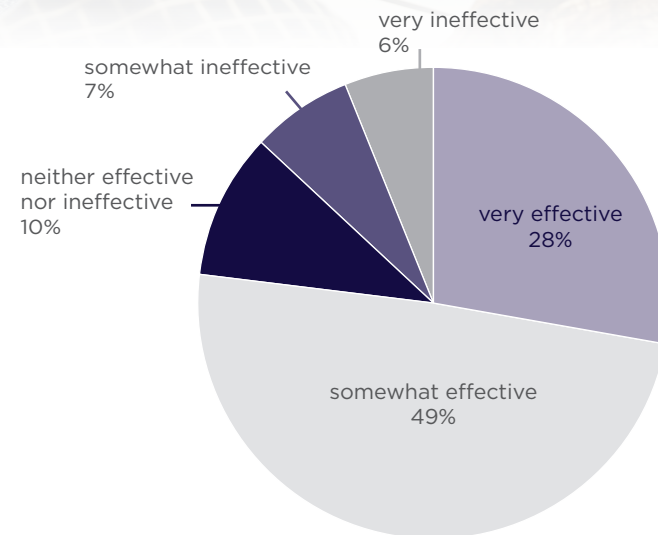
*"Employees need to see and hear the training more than once in order to fully comprehend the information."*



Survey Participant



## HOW EFFECTIVE IS REFRESHER TRAINING?



n=312

## EXPERT TIP

### TAKEAWAY 4: REFRESHER TRAINING IS SOMEWHAT OR VERY EFFECTIVE.



It's a best practice to provide refresher training, though not all regulations require it. This means you may not have to repeat your entire training program each year, but instead could speak to different parts of a regulation in shorter sessions throughout the year. For example, rather than address all of the Hazard Communication requirements, you could provide refresher training on Safety Data Sheets or labels.

To determine when refresher training is needed (in the absence of a specific regulatory requirement), ask a few employees questions about things they should have learned (key issues). If they can't answer, then more training is probably needed. Other ideas:

- ▶ Review injury logs. A pattern of injuries or near-miss reports probably indicates a need for more training.
- ▶ Audit the workplace. If you find violations like blocked fire extinguishers or exit routes, that means employees aren't correcting those violations, and are probably causing and contributing to violations. They need training.



*“Each employee learns differently, at different times. Refresher courses help them to assimilate information better.”*

Survey Participant



## TAKEAWAY 5:

# COMPANIES MEASURE TRAINING EFFECTIVENESS IN A VARIETY OF WAYS.



Evaluating your training allows you to assess whether it's having the desired results and lets you know whether you need to make changes to your training program. An evaluation will help you determine the amount of learning achieved and whether a worker's performance has improved on the job. Survey participants said they know safety training is effective through a variety of ways:

- ▶ Safety incident statistics,
- ▶ Safety observation reporting,
- ▶ Training assessments (i.e., tests, quizzes), and
- ▶ Follow-up observations.

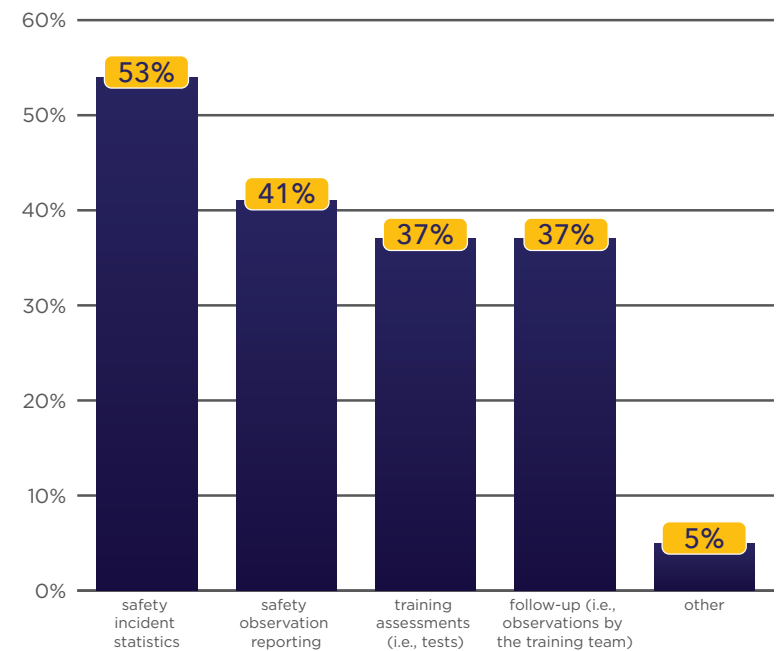
*"It's hard to determine the effectiveness of the training without spending more time observing the individuals more often."*

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Survey Participant



## HOW CAN YOU MEASURE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SAFETY TRAINING?



## EXPERT TIP

### TAKEAWAY 5: COMPANIES MEASURE TRAINING EFFECTIVENESS IN A VARIETY OF WAYS.



A follow-up evaluation is one of the best ways to assess what employees learned and whether your training course met its objectives. This helps training developers understand how much information learners retained, and if they have applied what they learned on the job. Follow up with learners to assess learning transfer after they've had time to go back to their workplace and apply what they've learned.

The timing of your evaluation should be based on your program resources, the specific topic of the training, and learners' capacity to apply what they learned in the workplace. For some trainings, it might also be appropriate to follow-up with learners' supervisors.

While OSHA doesn't require that you test or quiz employees after training, this is another great way to assess whether employees understand the information presented to them. It also may help identify areas where employees need further training or clarification.



*“Sometimes people get hurt at work by random accidents that we had no way of knowing needed to be covered.”*

Survey Participant



# BOTTOM LINE

## WORKPLACE SAFETY TRAINING IS NOT WITHOUT CHALLENGES.

Regardless of whether it's required by a specific regulation, workplace safety training benefits both employers and employees. Survey participants told us that time constraints and conflicts and employee engagement and participation were their biggest pain points. To make the most of the training time available and keep employees engaged, employers should:

- ▶ Determine which regulations apply to work employees are performing.
- ▶ Show employees how the training benefits them and helps keep them safe.
- ▶ Consider providing initial and/or refresher training in shorter segments.
- ▶ Conduct follow-up evaluations or learning assessments such as a quiz or test.

*“Keeping workplace training applicable to the job seems to be the most important to engagement by the employees. Having OSHA or safety training that is required but never applies is easily the fastest way to force disinvolvement of the training group.”*

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Survey Participant



# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rachel Krubsack joined J. J. Keller & Associates, Inc. in 2010 with a background in library and information science. As an Editor on the Environmental, Health, and Safety (EHS) team, she is responsible for writing, editing, and providing a variety of content for handbooks, manuals, online services, and webinars. Her topics of expertise include hazard communication and OSHA training requirements. In 2023, she completed OSHA 30 training for general industry.



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