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WOMEN AND SAFETY IN THE MODERN WORKPLACE

Creating a Diverse and Inclusive Workplace
Can Boost Safety, Productivity and Profitability



AMERICAN SOCIETY OF
SAFETY PROFESSIONALS



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INTRODUCTION

Today, women in the U.S. are more educated than ever before and make up nearly 50 percent of the U.S. workforce. However, they continue to be underrepresented in leadership roles, and they typically make less money than their male colleagues.

The safety industry is no exception to this trend. In fact, women make up far less than half of the safety profession, and they perhaps struggle even more than women in other industries to attain leadership roles.

Such gaps are not only problematic for women safety professionals wanting to advance their careers, but they also can make organizations and their workforces less safe — not to mention less profitable. When women aren't adequately embedded in every level of an organization, blind spots ensue and risks affecting a large portion of the working population are often overlooked.

The American Society of Safety Professionals (ASSP), a global association for occupational safety and health professionals, is committed to diversity and inclusion across the safety industry — not only to serve our members and their professional goals, but also because we believe a diverse and inclusive workplace is safer, more productive and more profitable.





That's why, in October 2018, ASSP and its Women in Safety Excellence (WISE) Common Interest Group brought together more than 50 safety experts representing businesses, nonprofits, labor, academia, government and professional associations for a summit on women's workplace safety. We focused on three key issues:

- **Increasing the number of women** who work in the occupational safety and health profession and who obtain industry leadership positions
- **Improving women workers' access to personal protective equipment** designed specifically for their different body types
- **Addressing workplace violence**, which disproportionately affects women, and is consistently a leading cause of death for women in the workplace

This report also touches on these three challenges and their potential solutions. It is one outcome of ASSP's ongoing initiative to improve diversity throughout the safety industry and ultimately make the workplace safer — a cause our members are dedicated to and passionate about, and which we support.





MEASURING THE GENDER GAP AT WORK

Diversity and inclusion are top-of-mind social and human capital issues for now and the foreseeable future. According to information from the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE)¹, diversity and inclusion concerns are often most visible in the workplace because people come together by circumstance rather than by choice.

Therefore, these issues, related to any group in the workplace, need to be addressed head on for the sake of employees and for the business. That means CEOs must make diversity and inclusion a strategic priority if they want to attract talent or be profitable.

The diverse makeup of the millennial generation, coupled with the fact that workers under age 34 are less likely than previous generations to subscribe to strict and conventional gender stereotypes, seems to indicate the younger workforce will not accept today's disparities among genders in the workplace, according to ASAE.

As it stands, the proportion of men to women in today's overall labor force is narrowing. Nearly 74 million women work in the civilian labor force, accounting for almost 47 percent of all U.S. workers, according to [Bureau of Labor Statistics data from February 2019](#).²

However, these numbers do not necessarily equal diversity, and equal representation does not necessarily mean a level playing field, says John McBride, SPHR, SHRM-SCP, director of recruiting for Consentium Search, a recruiting firm in the occupational safety and health industry.

He says if companies and industries want a truly diverse workforce and the resulting benefits, then they must make sure they are recruiting professionals with the right credentials, as well as different backgrounds and life experiences. At the same time, he recognizes that gender balance is important since men and women will have different perspectives.

"Don't just have a team that looks diverse," he advises. "You can't assume because people look different, they actually think differently. Pay attention to your group's gender makeup, but also be certain you're not bringing together people with such similar backgrounds that actual diversity is lost."

Gender Gap in the Safety Profession

The gender gap in the safety profession appears to be wider than that of the general workforce. Far fewer women than men have traditionally entered into and stayed in the profession. For instance, women represent 19 percent of those within the safety industry who responded to the [2018 SH&E Industry Salary Survey](#).³ Sponsored by ASSP and the Board of Certified Safety Professionals (BCSP), the survey captured data from nearly 10,000 respondents.

Further, women only make up 22 percent of professionals who have earned the certified safety professional designation, according to BCSP. The designation is considered the gold standard of safety certifications and is offered by BCSP to candidates who pass a certification exam.

"The profession has typically been viewed as male-dominated," says Pam Walaski, CSP, director of health and safety for GAI Consultants, a planning, engineering and environmental consulting firm, and a director-at-large for ASSP. "However, there aren't a lot of data out there that explain or even highlight the true disparities experienced among men and women in the safety profession. This makes it difficult to identify and address obstacles with absolute certainty."

Anecdotally, safety experts say the number of women entering the safety profession is improving, especially in entry-level and mid-level safety roles. Holly Burgess, CSP, environmental health and safety manager for Siemens Mobility, says she has seen the

¹ ASAE. ASAE Foresight Works Workforce and Workplace Action Set. Washington, DC: ASAE, 2018.

² Bureau of Labor Statistics. Economic News Release. Jan. 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst.t01.htm>

³ ASSP and BCSP. 2018 SH&E Salary Survey. Retrieved from https://www.assp.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/bcsp-asse_2018_salary_findings.pdf



shift firsthand in the safety profession, but is also witnessing more women in labor roles, particularly in manufacturing. Siemens Mobility is a division of Siemens, a global technology company.

"Twenty years ago I was the only woman in the room, whether I was among safety colleagues or among workers I was training on safety practices," Burgess says. "The numbers are improving, but we need to do better if we want to accurately represent all the workers we're trying to protect."

Michael Murray, national risk control leader for Gallagher Global Brokering USA, says the first step is to recruit the right talent to the safety industry — ensuring that the most qualified practitioners are advocating for safety in the workplace. He says efforts to attract the best practitioners should organically translate into a more diverse profession.

"Diversity is important for any business and any industry, but maybe even more so in safety because we're trying to protect a wide variety of workers," he says. "We need both men and women represented. If we don't bring a diverse, inclusive thought process into the profession, we will miss opportunities to impact the organizations we serve as safety professionals."

Gender Gap in Safety Leadership Positions

The small percentage of women safety professionals compared to male safety professionals may be contributing to gaps in pay between the two genders, and the relatively limited number of women who hold safety leadership positions — challenges that are mostly documented anecdotally by experts because there is a lack of relevant data.

"We see the opportunity for more women to become engaged in the field and also within leadership positions," says Marla Corson, Ph.D.,

CSP, director of safety, health and environment for Amazon. "But we need to gather more data so we really understand what we are working with here. From there, we can work on targeted and focused initiatives to drive change that we can actually measure."

In general, pay gaps persist between men and women, regardless of industry. According to the most recent [U.S. Census data](#),⁴ the women-to-men earnings ratio in 2017 was 0.805 — a ratio that is often translated into 80 cents on the dollar. However, disparities in pay among men and women safety professionals actually appear to be smaller, according to the [2018 SH&E Industry Salary Survey](#).⁵ Women make between about 90 percent and 94 percent of what their male colleagues make, depending on the job title being compared. Across the data points referenced, a pay gap clearly exists.

As for gender-specific leadership data in the safety industry, safety experts could only point to observations that women have fewer leadership roles than men. But, regardless of industry, for every 100 men promoted to managers, 79 women are promoted to managers, according to "[Women in the Workplace 2018](#)," a joint study from [McKinsey and Company](#) and [LeanIn.org](#).⁶ This means men hold 62 percent of manager positions, while women hold 38 percent.

Walaski says women typically enter their chosen profession, spend the early years gaining experience, generally do well in obtaining their first manager-level position, then they drop off for lots of reasons — not all of which are related to leaving the workforce temporarily to have children.

"By the time women should be ready — in terms of their experience — for a more senior-level or executive position, there are very few potential candidates," she says. "With such a small pool, it will be very difficult to bridge the gap without figuring out why there is a hole in the middle and removing barriers."

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. News Release, Sept. 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2018/income-poverty.html>

⁵ ASSP and BCSP. 2018 SH&E Salary Survey. Retrieved from https://www.assp.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/bcsp-asse_2018_salary_findings.pdf

⁶ McKinsey and Company and LeanIn.org. Women in the Workplace 2018. Retrieved from <https://womenintheworkplace.com/>

Jennifer McNelly, ASSP chief executive officer, believes managing the pipeline is critical. She says it's important that we determine why women leave the field, then devise strategies around how to keep them from exiting.

"If we don't have anyone in the pipeline, we're never going to see any progress," she says. "Also, if gender equity and female representation don't exist at the top, we won't ever get there because we won't be making strategic decisions."

Gender Gap in Safety Education

To close the gender gap in the safety industry, both in leadership and non-leadership roles, changes must also prevail within the educational institutions and organizations that train students to become safety professionals.

ASSP has approximately 1,460 active student members. A student member is any student pursuing an undergraduate or advanced safety-related degree and paying dues to the Society. Of those members, 1,011 (70 percent) are men and 449 (30 percent) are women.⁷

But beyond ASSP, industry data are limited on the prevalence of women in occupational safety and health academic programs at higher education institutions. Anecdotally, safety experts say they are seeing more women students at individual universities with safety programs.

Linda F. Martin, CSP, CIH, CHMM, faculty member and coordinator of the online M.S. in Safety and Occupational Health Applied Sciences degree program at Keene State College, says while more women students are taking safety-related courses today than

when she began teaching, the imbalance is still noticeable. However, she could not provide exact numbers.

"As an instructor, I see more women in my classes, but they still make up a small percentage of my students," Martin says. "We need to do a better job of introducing youth to safety — getting to guidance counselors and reaching out to kids in high school. If we educate people at a younger age, they are more likely to consider it as a career."

The lack of women in safety-related academic programs within higher education institutions could be tied to the broader societal challenge of fewer women being interested in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) careers in general.

A study by the American Association of University Women⁸ found that among first-year college students, women are much less likely than men to say they intend to declare a STEM major. By graduation, men outnumber women in nearly every science and engineering field.

While occupational safety and health careers are not strictly aligned with STEM careers, they have enough in common that if gains are made drawing women into STEM programs and careers, gains could also be made attracting more women to occupational safety and health careers.

"Right now, a woman with safety credentials is like gold to companies looking for safety professionals," McBride says. "There are not enough women in the field and that's in part because a lot of women don't even know safety is a career option. It's our responsibility to make women aware of how a career in safety is a fulfilling choice and to get them attracted to it at an earlier age."

⁷ ASSP. (Feb. 2019). Student membership data.

⁸ American Association of University Women. (March 2015). Solving the equation: The variables for women's success in engineering and computing. Retrieved from https://www.aauw.org/aauw_check/pdf_download/show_pdf.php?file=solving-the-equation



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"Diversity is important for any business and any industry, but maybe even more so in safety because we're trying to protect a wide variety of workers. We need both men and women represented. If we don't bring a diverse, inclusive thought process into the profession, we will miss opportunities to impact the organizations we serve as safety professionals."

– Michael Murray, National Risk Control Leader,
Gallagher Global Brokering USA



SAFETY IN NUMBERS:

INITIATIVES CAN BOOST SAFETY, PROFITABILITY

Safety experts consistently report that when an organization's leadership team reflects the makeup of its workforce, it's more likely to recognize and address the many challenges facing its varied populations — and those initiatives will ultimately make all employees safer.

"Women and men are not the same. Their risks are not the same," says Cori Wong, Ph.D., assistant vice president for gender equity at Colorado State University. "When differences are taken into account, everyone benefits. This is not about special treatment."

McNelly says that increasing the number of women throughout the entire safety profession — from the top down and the bottom up — goes beyond the goal of advancing women.

Diverse Perspectives Needed for Diverse Problems

Every industry, workplace and even workforce population faces its own set of challenges and risks. What poses a threat to men in the workplace might not be as much of a threat to women and vice versa, says Wells Bullard, CEO of Bullard, a manufacturer of personal protective equipment.

"Men and women are different and so are the risks they face," Bullard says. "We need to accommodate for these differences when developing and instituting safety procedures and policies."

"Diversifying the safety profession is not about meeting quotas. It's really about safety. We want to create work environments that ensure that all employees are safe. If women — or any other group — don't have a voice at the table, then their perspectives are lost, along with opportunities to protect the workforce at large."

– Jennifer McNelly, CEO, ASSP



For instance, while workplace violence impacts all employees, it is uniquely problematic for women. It consistently is a leading cause of death among working women each year, according to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#).⁹ (See sidebar on women and workplace violence.)

Women also face different work-related health risks than men. [According to the National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety](#),¹⁰ women are more susceptible than men to carpal tunnel syndrome, tendinitis, respiratory diseases, infectious and parasitic diseases, and anxiety and stress disorders. Improperly fitting personal protective equipment is another real challenge for women. (See sidebar on women and personal protective equipment.)

Abby Ferri, CSP, vice president of the national construction practice for Hays Companies and 2018-20 Administrator of ASSP's Women in Safety Excellence (WISE) Common Interest Group, says diverse perspectives at all levels of an organization are necessary to help identify and solve for these differences among men and women in the workplace.

"Women make up nearly 50 percent of the workforce and often experience occupational risks different than men," Ferri says. "However, safety interventions frequently take a one-size-fits-all approach. We must advocate for gender-specific solutions."

Bullard says diversity and inclusion can help with more than identifying and solving for safety risks. She says they also help solicit buy-in from the workforce around safety initiatives and help improve compliance.

"Safety is all about people," Bullard explains. "People are more likely to respond to those who are like them. We want to make sure we can reach out to the most workers possible with the message of safety. This requires diversity among those individuals delivering the message."

⁹ Bureau of Labor Statistics. (Jan. 2018). TED: The Economics Daily. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2018/there-were-500-workplace-homicides-in-the-united-states-in-2016.htm>

¹⁰ NIOSH. (2001). Women's safety and health issues at work (NIOSH Publication No. 2001-123). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2001-123/default.html>

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE & PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT PUT WOMEN AT GREATER RISK THAN MALE COLLEAGUES

Organizations that lack perspective from women — whether in safety roles, other leadership roles and even on the front lines — can actually be less safe, safety experts say. If employees are not attuned to women's occupational hazard risks because the majority doesn't encounter such risks, the hazards will remain.

"Without women's perspectives, the problems women face and their potential solutions could very well continue to be overlooked," says Kelly Bernish, CSP, president of Global SHE Solutions, a safety, health and environmental consultancy group, and a founding member of ASSP's Women in Safety Excellence (WISE) Common Interest Group.

Two major safety issues for women that companies cannot afford to continue to overlook are workplace violence and improperly fitting personal protective equipment (PPE). These challenges don't solely affect women, but they do affect them uniquely and necessitate gender-specific solutions.

Workplace Violence Is a Unique Danger for Women

According to Bureau of Labor Statistics,¹ homicides are a leading cause of occupational fatalities among women. In 2016, they represented 24 percent of all fatal occupational injuries to women, compared with 9 percent of fatal occupational injuries to men during the same year.

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2018). TED: The Economics Daily. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2018/there-were-500-workplace-homicides-in-the-united-states-in-2016.htm>



While we can't draw absolute correlations from these data, the heightened risk for women seems to stem from two major areas of concern. First, woman-dominated fields like nursing, social work, retail and education tend to have less controlled work environments, giving perpetrators (who are often patients in healthcare settings, customers in retail settings or students in education settings) easier access.

Statistics reveal that workers in the healthcare and social work industries, most of whom are women, are particularly vulnerable. For example, the Government Accountability Office² found that healthcare workers in inpatient facilities are 5 to 12 times more likely to suffer a nonfatal workplace violence injury than other workers.

Based on these facts, Congress has introduced legislation that would protect workers in these sectors from the threat of workplace violence. The pending legislation would mandate the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to create a federal standard requiring employers in these industries to develop and implement a comprehensive workplace violence prevention plan.

Second, about 27 percent of all violent events in a workplace are tied to domestic violence, according to the Department of Labor.³ Nearly one-third of women murdered at work are killed by intimate partners, including husbands, boyfriends and ex-partners, according to the

NIOSH study, "Workplace Homicides Among U.S. Women: The Role of Intimate Partner Violence."⁴

Wells Bullard, CEO of Bullard, a PPE manufacturer, recommends combating workplace violence against women with a holistic program that does the following:

- **Educates and trains employees about the problem**
- **Evaluates building security policies and procedures**
- **Offers employee assistance programs, communicates their availability and highlights their value as a resource for those under duress, particularly from domestic violence**
- **Provides a hotline so employees can report any potential issues happening at work**

Participants at ASSP's Women's Workplace Safety Summit identified several actions employers and other stakeholders can take to minimize workplace violence against women. These include efforts to:

- **Properly define workplace violence so everyone better understands it**

² U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2016, March). Workplace safety and health: Additional efforts needed to help protect health care workers from workplace violence. Retrieved from <https://www.gao.gov/assets/680/675858.pdf>

³ Department of Labor. Workplace violence program. Retrieved from <https://www.dol.gov/oasam/hrc/policies/dol-workplace-violence-program.htm>

⁴ NIOSH. (2012). Workplace homicides among U.S. women: The role of intimate partner violence. *Annals of Epidemiology*.





- **Collect data on causes, historical changes and incidence of workplace violence against women**
- **Build employee awareness and provide tools for dealing with workplace violence**
- **Create a prevention framework and develop tools to quantify financial losses from workplace violence**
- **Advocate for the issue and influence standards development**

"The violence against women is alarming," Bullard says. "We have to create a culture of conversation in the workplace around this issue because so few people realize how violence at work disproportionately affects women. And violence against any one person at work can quickly turn into violence against others."

Workplace violence is a growing problem in the U.S. and it affects every workplace and all worker populations. ASSP's five-part active shooter video series outlines strategies organizations can implement to develop a higher level of preparedness to protect all workers against violence and its devastating impacts.

Learn more.

Improperly Fitting Personal Protective Equipment Is a Real Challenge for Women

Also alarming is the number of injuries that result from workers either foregoing or independently modifying PPE while on the job — regardless of gender. In fact, failure to wear PPE was the second-leading cause of injuries in the workplace in 2014, according to a survey of 1,000 safety professionals.⁵ The survey was sponsored by BLR, an information services and technology company in the compliance space, and SafeStart, a safety training company.

Many workers said they are noncompliant because PPE is uncomfortable or does not properly fit. This affects all people on the front lines, where PPE is the last line of defense against workplace hazards. But women in particular struggle to find gear that accommodates their different shapes and sizes, says Abby Ferri, CSP, vice president of the national construction practice for Hays Companies and the 2018-20 Administrator of WISE. She says manufacturers will often just resize gear to junior sizes or simply create a smaller version of the standard men's gear.

"Many of the size, cut and style options available on the market for women are not rooted in science," she explains. "The 'shrink and pink' phenomenon assumes that all women are petite and thin. People fall into a range of sizes and protective gear should reflect that reality."

Holly Burgess, CSP, EHS manager for Siemens Mobility, says challenges for women include

⁵ BLR & SafeStart. (2014). Safety and the human factor [infographic]. Retrieved from <https://ehsdailyadvisor.blr.com/infographic/infographic-safety-the-human-factor-sponsored-by-safestart/>



work gloves and safety goggles that are often too large; a lack of maternity PPE for expectant mothers; and gear that is too long or too bulky, which can create tripping hazards or expose more of the body to hazards. She says ill-fitting PPE can also psychologically affect workers.

"As more women enter into positions that require PPE, the lack of PPE for women becomes more apparent," Burgess says. "Something is wrong when the very equipment that is supposed to protect you actually creates additional safety hazards. Physically, properly fitting PPE makes workers more comfortable. Psychologically, it makes them more confident and productive."

Ferri says the costs of customization and offering a broader range of sizes are common barriers that must be addressed with suppliers and those who make purchasing decisions. She says it's also important to educate those involved in selecting and purchasing PPE, as well as those who manufacture the equipment.

Participants at ASSP's summit identified several actions employers and other stakeholders can take that would help improve the availability of PPE for women:

- **Gather data to develop universal fit guidelines**
- **Provide ratings and reviews of PPE and work gear**
- **Publish guidance geared toward equipment users**
- **Participate in the development of an ASSP technical report on PPE that would include guidance on selecting gear for different populations**

"By harnessing our collective power, we can lead a deeper global conversation around issues facing women in the workforce — particularly around workplace violence and inadequate personal protective equipment. We can make a lasting impact on women everywhere," Ferri concludes.



The Business Case for Diversity and Inclusion: Everyone Profits

Achieving diversity and inclusion in the safety industry so that fewer gender-specific risks are overlooked and all employees are safer might sound like a feel-good initiative, but in truth it's a business decision that can have a tremendous positive impact on the bottom line, says Kelly Bernish, CSP, president of Global SHE Solutions LLC, a safety, health and environmental consultancy group, and a founding member of WISE.

"Often safety is seen as an outside entity that is not considered part of the core business or core culture," Bernish says. "But if safety professionals are brought into businesses' overall strategic thinking, they can use their expertise, which often goes underleveraged, to point out vulnerabilities, opportunities or costly safety-related implications that would otherwise go unnoticed and unaddressed."

According to the 2018 Liberty Mutual Workplace Safety Index,¹¹ serious nonfatal workforce injuries amounted to nearly \$60 billion in direct U.S. workers' compensation costs. Businesses spent more than \$1 billion a week on these injuries.

Clearly, creating one-size-fits-all safety solutions won't improve these numbers since men and women can be prone to different occupational injuries, and according to statistical data, even subject to different workers' compensation reimbursement standards, Bernish says.

"In a non-inclusive environment, risks will be overlooked and nothing will change," she states. "People with diverse backgrounds and experiences should be in place throughout all levels of the organization to raise awareness of all possible issues and opportunities alike."

Gender diversity's impact on a business' profitability runs deeper than potentially reducing workers' compensation costs. According to the 2015 McKinsey and Company "Diversity Matters"¹² report, companies with a diverse workforce are 35 percent more likely to outperform those without diversity initiatives.

Similarly, a recent study by Boston Consulting Group¹³ found that "increasing the diversity of leadership teams leads to more and better innovation, and improved financial performance." According to these researchers, companies with more diverse management teams have 19 percent higher revenue because of innovation.

In addition, having women at the C-suite level significantly increases net margins, according to a study from The Peterson Institute for International Economics.¹⁴ The survey found that a company with women in 30 percent of its leadership roles could anticipate adding 1 percent to its net margin, compared to a similar firm with no women in leadership roles. That 1 percent increase represents a 15 percent boost to profitability, the report says.

"Having both women and men in the safety field balances out the strengths they both bring to the table, which only serves employers better," Martin says.

¹¹ Liberty Mutual. (2018). 2018 Liberty Mutual Workplace Safety Index. Retrieved from <https://business.libertymutualgroup.com/business-insurance/Documents/Services/Workplace%20Safety%20Index.pdf>

¹² McKinsey and Company. (2015). Diversity matters. Retrieved from <https://assets.mckinsey.com/~media/857F440109AA4D13A54D9C496D86ED58.ashx>

¹³ Boston Consulting Group. (2018). How diverse leadership teams boost innovation. Retrieved from <https://www.bcg.com/en-us/publications/2018/how-diverse-leadership-teams-boost-innovation.aspx>

¹⁴ The Peterson Institute of International Economics. (2016). Is gender diversity profitable? Evidence from a global survey. Retrieved from <https://piie.com/publications/working-papers/gender-diversity-profitable-evidence-global-survey>





**WHAT AFFECTS
DIVERSITY IN SAFETY?
HOW CAN WE IMPROVE IT?**

With so much evidence that effective diversity and inclusion practices can produce real returns for businesses, why do gaps in diverse hiring, compensation and professional advancement persist? Furthermore, why is the safety industry in particular lagging behind and how can this be fixed?

Examining the Lack of Diversity in Safety

Safety experts relay a whole host of reasons the industry is lacking diversity, but they consistently list unconscious bias as a leading factor. Unconscious bias is beliefs or stereotypes about groups of people that we unconsciously develop based on personal traditions, values and cultural experiences.

McBride notes that unconscious bias can be difficult to overcome because individuals don't realize or don't want to accept that they are prone to making such judgments. At the same time, he says it's critical for people to be educated about unconscious bias and to honestly begin recognizing it in themselves and others for progress to occur.

"Implicit bias is probably the most prevalent yet least talked about issue facing any company and our society in general," he says. "We all have preconceived notions about other people for a variety of reasons. The prejudices are not necessarily the problem. It's when we act on those prejudices that it becomes problematic. The only way around it is to shed light on it."

Doing so is important because it will likely help to overcome the broader societal issues

that safety experts say contribute to a lack of gender equity in the profession, including work-family imbalance caused by inflexible work environments; categorizing certain jobs as men's work and others as women's work; and not enforcing zero tolerance policies that aim to prevent behaviors like sexual harassment or threatening behavior that minimizes women.

However, it's not enough to simply inform or educate employees about unconscious bias. Organizations need formal policies, programs and measures for success in order to see gains in diversity and inclusion within their businesses.

"People cling to their world view even when it doesn't make a lot of sense," Walaski says. "Education is important, but organizations need to commit to changing systems as much as trying to change people because that is where they will see the greatest impact."

For this to happen, leadership must fully support the institution of systems and processes that remove the barriers, structures, practices, people or the attitudes that prevent women — or any other marginalized group — from succeeding.

"You can't put diversity and inclusion on the backs of people who are not represented," McNelly says. "It must come from the top. Leadership alignment sets the corporate agenda, and if leaders demonstrate their commitment to diversity and inclusion with actual actions, the message will cascade across every level of the organization."



Recommendations for Increasing Diversity and Inclusion in Safety

Diversity and inclusion can make workplaces safer and further protect greater numbers of employees from injuries and fatalities. Organizations should take the following actions to help increase diversity within today's workplace.

Create an Inclusive Culture

Differences are often viewed as problems to be fixed. Instead, organizations should work to incorporate differences rather than try to mitigate them. Inclusion occurs when practices affirm, value, embrace and incorporate differences. Leadership sets an organization's priorities and it sends a clear message by demonstrating through action its commitment to diversity and inclusion. Leaders should focus attention on changing structures and practices that prevent women or any marginalized group from succeeding. In addition, leaders should focus on using their influence to identify and remove systemic and cultural barriers so that those who are most affected by these issues can share their lived experiences, discuss the problems they face and help develop effective solutions.

Gain Understanding

To level out historical and current inequities, the industry must pay the most attention to the people who have been the most disadvantaged and the issues they have faced. By supporting the group that is the most difficult to elevate, or going beyond the mainstream marginalized groups, the industry will end up helping more individuals. That's because the issues affecting the most disadvantaged group or groups likely also affect everyone else. To gain such understanding, the people who are affected must be involved because they can bring the greatest understanding of the problems they face and offer potential solutions.

Train, Educate, Communicate

To improve gender equity in the workforce, employees at every level of an organization need education and training around unconscious bias, the barriers women face when entering and advancing in their respective professions, and actual safety issues for women like workplace violence and ill-fitting personal protective equipment. Communication should precede the rollout of any diversity and inclusion program. These messages should emphasize why diversity and inclusion efforts are important to the workforce — fostering a sense of community and shared purpose among leaders and all other employees.

Recruit and Retain

The industry must focus on recruiting women into safety-related degree programs at the university level. To achieve this, the safety profession must be introduced to high schoolers before they make their college selection, and more must be done to recruit college students with undeclared majors. The industry should also recruit women interested in transitioning professions mid-career — likely candidates include women from healthcare and law enforcement industries. But beyond recruitment efforts, the industry needs to focus on retention and strengthening the pipeline of women entering the safety profession so women are embedded at every level.



Provide Formal Support

Safety experts consistently say formally mentoring and sponsoring women in the safety profession is critical to their advancement. Nearly all the women interviewed for this report indicated they had been mentored or sponsored at some point during their career — by both men and women. They say having people coach them, listen to them and help them navigate the safety industry and their individual career paths has been instrumental to their successes. Mentors and sponsors prevented them from getting too discouraged throughout challenging periods or situations during their career and kept them in the industry, they say.

Develop Systemic Safeguards

Organizations should institute standardized hiring and promotion policies and practices to curb at least some unconscious bias, in addition to their efforts to change employee behavior. For instance, all candidates should be subject to the same standardized interview questions and be interviewed by a diverse pool of employees. This can help to mitigate against bringing only like-minded people with similar life experiences and backgrounds into the organization. In addition, organizations should create cultures of caring and listening so employees feel safe offering feedback or approaching management about workplace risks.

Engage Men in Initiatives

Improving gender equity and diversity are a strategic priority with long-term performance benefits. That means men must be actively involved in these initiatives. According to [Boston Consulting Group](#),¹⁵ this can include serving on an internal diversity committee, modeling behaviors that create an inclusive environment, sponsoring a high-potential woman and advocating for her advancement, and challenging common assumptions about the roles women want to have. Men also need to actively support flexible work policies, such as part-time work and parental leave. To do so, they, themselves, must use these programs and encourage others to do as well. In addition, it's important to recognize the tendency to overestimate progress on gender issues. A study by [McKinsey and Company and Leanin.org](#)¹⁶ found that 45% of men think that women are well represented in leadership when 1 in 10 senior leaders in a company is a woman. By comparison, only 28% of women agree with this statement.

Measure Success

Organizations that don't develop and analyze performance metrics around their diversity and inclusion programs run the risk of making inaccurate assumptions about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of their initiatives. Data are needed around the demographics of those individuals working at an organization; the demographics of those in management positions; the length of time it takes individuals in certain demographic groups to get promoted versus those in other demographic groups; and employees' attitudes regarding their colleagues and whether their attitudes are shifting and behaviors are changing after education and training. Without metrics, it's not possible to set and meet realistic benchmarks for workplace diversity and inclusion.

¹⁵ Boston Consulting Group. (2017, Oct.). Five ways men can improve gender diversity at work. Retrieved from <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2017/people-organization-behavior-culture-five-ways-men-improve-gender-diversity-work.aspx>

¹⁶ McKinsey and Company and LeanIn.org. Women in the Workplace 2018. Retrieved from <https://womenintheworkplace.com>





CONCLUSION

Despite improvements over time, gender inequality persists within the safety industry. Women continue to be the vast minority of safety professionals and are even less prevalent in leadership positions where their perspective could have the greatest impact.

Advancing women safety professionals is not an attempt to displace men from the profession. In truth, it's less about advancing women's careers and more about achieving balance so all workers are better represented and, therefore, better protected from all hazards.

To achieve that balance, the industry must dedicate itself to removing the barriers that restrict women from entering, remaining and advancing in safety careers. This involves:

- **Organizational culture that embraces differences**
- **Empathy for the most marginalized groups of people**
- **Training, education and communication**
- **Emboldened recruitment and retention efforts**
- **Formalized mentorship and sponsorship programs**
- **Engaged men who actively support these strategic initiatives**
- **Systemic safeguards that remove barriers and promote success**
- **Metrics to measure limitations and progress**





Further, the organizations supported by women safety professionals must pay close attention to the existence of unconscious bias among their employees — helping them to understand and overcome their own gender-related prejudices.

All of this helps to create a culture of inclusion that not only supports women, but also helps make the workplace safer, more productive and, ultimately, more profitable.

“We’re making progress,” Walaski says, “but we must continue to work to make sure the safety industry is diverse and inclusive — for women, men and all other groups. We all benefit when diversity exists at our organizations and among our leaders.”

Engage With ASSP

Learn more about our efforts and how you can help influence change on these important issues by connecting with us in the **ASSP Community**.





WOMEN AND SAFETY: OUR STORIES



Name: Pam Walaski, CSP
Title: Director of Health and Safety
Company: GAI Consultants
Industry Experience: 25 years

What is the biggest change you've seen for women in safety during your career?

Depending on the university, we're seeing greater gender balance in safety-related degree programs. This will hopefully translate into a stronger pipeline of women in the industry who can eventually obtain leadership positions and adequately represent women in the workforce.

What is the biggest obstacle women must still overcome in the safety industry?

Getting women into safety leadership positions remains a struggle. We see females filling entry-level safety positions and then falling off after three to five years in the industry, and fading away even more before reaching the executive level.

What has been your biggest safety success?

Being elected to ASSP's board of directors has been very important because it has allowed me the opportunity to influence thousands of people through the Society and therefore make a greater impact on the safety of workers as a whole.





Name: Wells Bullard

Title: Chief Executive Officer

Company: Bullard

Industry Experience: 11 years as a professional, but a lifetime as part of a fifth-generation family business in the safety industry

What is the biggest change you've seen for women in safety during your career?

In recent years I've seen an influx of personal protective equipment specifically designed for women, which is important as more women enter into what have traditionally been male-dominated roles. I've also seen increased visibility of women in the field to one another. Women are doing a good job of trying to connect with one another.

What is the biggest obstacle women must still overcome in the safety industry?

Still, too few women are represented in the safety industry. We need to increase the voice of women in the industry, as well as attract more women and other underrepresented groups. Seeing people like yourself in the industry signals that the industry cares about you.

What has been your biggest safety success?

I'm proud of the culture of safety we've developed internally at Bullard. Safety is in our DNA — both in the protective equipment we manufacture and the safe workplace we provide for our own employees. We listen to our employees to better understand what safety initiatives we need to drive.





Name: Kelly Bernish, CSP

Title: President

Company: Global SHE Solutions LLC

Industry Experience: 30 years

What is the biggest change you've seen for women in safety during your career?

More women are entering the safety profession, and I believe we are changing how women in the industry are viewed. We're also influencing changes that need to be made to protect all women in the workforce, not just those in the safety industry. For example, PPE designed specifically for women did not exist when I started my career and now several vendors have entire lines of products devoted to women.

What is the biggest obstacle women must still overcome in the safety industry?

In general, the biggest obstacle facing women safety professionals are the inherent biases people have about women, including women themselves and their own self-limiting thoughts. Both contribute to the lack of women in safety leadership roles, particularly at the executive level.

What has been your biggest safety success?

One of my most cherished successes is being a founding member of the Women in Safety Excellence member community within ASSP. The work being done through WISE has and will continue to impact not only many women, but also men. Men must be part of the solution. Not only has the group gotten women safety professionals more involved and more supported in our industry, but it also has allowed us to work toward solving long-standing issues that affect women in the workforce.





Name: Abby Ferri, CSP
Title: Vice President, National Construction Practice
Company: Hays Companies
Industry Experience: 16 years

What is the biggest change you've seen for women in safety during your career?

I'm seeing more women and more equal representation in safety organizations. I'm also noticing a lot of strong and confident women coming out of safety programs at colleges, who have been supported and mentored by ASSP members invested in their success.

What is the biggest obstacle women must still overcome in the safety industry?

Elevating women to leadership roles is a real struggle. Even though we're getting more women into the industry, we're often losing them because they are either having bad experiences or the industry isn't flexible enough for women to succeed as professionals and parents or caretakers of family members.

What has been your biggest safety success?

Being elected as an administrator to ASSP's Women in Safety Excellence member community has allowed me to use my voice and amplify others' voices so I can make a greater impact on workers and their safety. I've also enjoyed the success of implementing programs for my employers that have improved worker safety and helped the business.





Name: Holly Burgess, CSP
Title: Environmental Health and Safety Manager
Company: Siemens Mobility
Industry Experience: 20 years

What is the biggest change you've seen for women in safety during your career?

More women are going into manufacturing and, therefore, a greater need exists to provide them with the appropriate protective equipment and ensure their safety.

What is the biggest obstacle women must still overcome in the safety industry?

Women often have to overcome the misconception that they are uninformed or lack knowledge about plant operations or work environments dominated by male laborers. As a woman who trains workers on safety, I have witnessed eye rolls as soon as I walk in a room and students discover I'm their trainer. However, by being personable, a good listener and demonstrating my knowledge without being defensive, I have overcome a lot of skepticism throughout the years.

What has been your biggest safety success?

Just recently I was selected by the International Safety Equipment Association to speak on a panel about personal protective equipment. It was an honor to speak on behalf of women and the importance of developing PPE that protects women and gives them the confidence they need to do their jobs and go home safe.





Name: Linda F. Martin, CSP, CIH, CHMM

Title: Faculty member and coordinator, online M.S. in Safety and Occupational Health Applied Sciences

Company: Keene State College

Industry Experience: Nearly 30 years

What is the biggest change you've seen for women in safety during your career?

Women have become more supported by each other in the workplace, and as a result, more confident. In the past, women were more threatened by each other because of the competitive nature of moving upward in their careers. Women aren't as threatened by other women in the workforce as much anymore because there are enough jobs in safety for everyone and people are more willing to share the secrets to success and provide quality mentoring.

What is the biggest obstacle you think women in safety still must overcome?

The biggest obstacle that women in safety need to overcome is the misconception that it is men against the women or vice versa when it comes to success and advancement in the profession. I've had many quality, caring male mentors during my career and I feel we all need to work together without such an intense focus on gender inequality or competition.

What has been your biggest safety success?

I am particularly proud of my work on the BCSP board of directors, being involved in providing high-quality credentialing to safety professionals. I have also worked in the construction, environmental and academic fields for almost 30 years. My biggest safety success is putting that professional depth of knowledge into safety academic curriculum that is aimed at providing the most current education for students and young professionals. Raising the bar on the relevancy of coursework and what is expected from students and aspiring practitioners is what my focus has been on for the past several years.





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520 N. Northwest Highway, Park Ridge, IL 60068 | 847.699.2929 | www.assp.org

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