3 Current Trends in Occupational Safety and Health in 2024

Chris McGlynn, CSP®
Master's in Occupational Safety and Health

COLUMBIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY
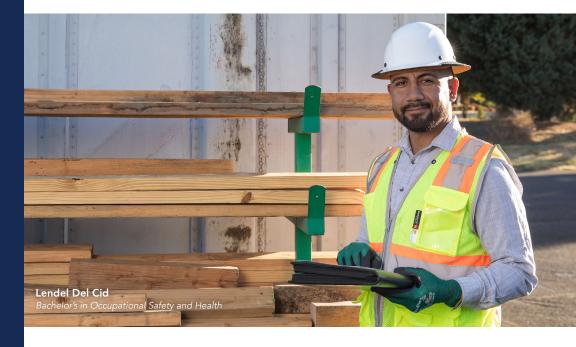
ColumbiaSouthern.edu » 877.347.6050

M any of the workplace safety trends that characterized 2023 will continue into 2024, but the longer-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are continuing to change the ways people work and relate to each other.

Looking forward is a great way to prepare and plan for what might be around the corner, while making sure you're able to support your organization and staff with their current needs. Here three key trends in occupational safety and health to look forward to in 2024.

» 1. Mental Health:
The Most Common Workplace Health Issue

One of the most troubling effects of the pandemic was a significant rise in mental health problems, which led to issues with substance abuse, sleep problems, stress, and poor work performance. Although this created broader awareness and acceptance of mental health problems, which are sometimes stigmatized, it also exposed the lack of mental health resources currently available, even in developed countries.

This awareness led to some major changes, pushing employers to provide better resources and guidance for employees who may be struggling with stress, anxiety or substance abuse. Mental health issues are the most common workplace health problem because they are universal; workers in every industry, workplace, and level of career attainment are susceptible to stress. Although mental health has been a key focus for occupational health professionals in recent years, the growing awareness of these issues and people's willingness to speak up and seek help are expected to keep them center stage in 2024.

Lendel Del Cid
Bachelor's in Occupational Safety and Health

» 2. Sustainability As a Key Component of OSH

As organizations in every industry reorient their operations to be more sustainable and conscious of environmental impact, this can also have major implications for workplace safety and health. The connections between safety and environmental management are many, and they can be in tension or collaborative, depending on the issue. For example, a new, greener exhaust system for industrial machinery may reduce its carbon footprint, but it may also depend on dangerous chemicals or generate significant noise, which can adversely impact workers' health.

OSH experts are becoming more comfortable and confident as partners in sustainability efforts, striking a balance between efficiency, safety, and reduced environmental impacts. At times, OSH professionals need to advocate for workers, help implement retraining and safety processes as new technology is implemented, or ensure that new sustainability guidelines do not have negative impacts or increase safety risks for workers. This balance requires OSH professionals to develop a deep understanding of the ideas that underpin sustainability, the current and future sustainability benchmarks their employers want to reach, and any new technology or techniques in their industry.

Christopher Green
Associate in Occupational Safety and Health

» 3. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) As an OSH Priority

DEI is another set of priorities that have become increasingly important to modern organizations, and these priorities extend into OSH issues. Because equity and inclusion relate to the unique issues faced by marginalized members of a community or workplace, OSH professionals are increasingly becoming familiar with these issues and the ways they can be addressed. While OSH initiatives and priorities alone cannot create equity or promote diversity, they can help members of marginalized communities feel heard, respected and safe in their jobs.

Just like sustainability, an OSH approach to DEI needs to be collaborative and include input from workers, human resources professionals, subject matter experts, and other stakeholders. OSH has a unique role to play when helping team members to learn and view DEI as a part of safety and health. Team members who are not familiar with the ideas that inform DEI may find it easier to understand and invest in if they learn about the impact they can have on their coworkers' mental and physical safety at work. By helping collaborate across departments and teams and encourage buy-in from employees and managers, OSH workers can have a major impact on their organization's DEI priorities.

COLUMBIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

For more on this topic, we recommend reading a recent Q&A published by the American Society of Safety Professionals in which safety experts provided answers to questions such as:
• How can safety professionals support and influence DEI initiatives?
• What DEI concepts are important to occupational safety and health?
• What strategies are effective when responding to DEI challenges?

Become an OSH Expert at Columbia Southern University

Students enrolled in the online occupational safety and health degree programs at Columbia Southern University have many options, including concentrations in multiple industries and courses which cover the principles of modern OSH.

To learn more about occupational safety and health degrees at CSU – including options at the associate, bachelor's, master's and doctoral levels – visit our website.

Multiple factors, including prior experience, geography and degree field, affect career outcomes. CSU does not guarantee a job, promotion, salary increase, eligibility for a position, or other career growth.

Eric Simmons
Master's in Occupational Safety and Health