

GHSL Reference Group meeting 16/04/2025

The Government Health and Safety Lead (GHSL) Reference Group acts as a touchpoint for aligning GHSL work programme with what the sector is seeing and doing. This group comes together to share what's top of mind, emerging risks & issues and how their organisations are responding. Insights shared here reflect common sectoral themes. The meeting runs under Chatham House Rules but if anyone would like to follow up on an area of interest, the GHSL can link people up.

Who is the GHSL Reference Group?

The Reference Group is made up of health, safety and wellbeing lead representatives from a range of agency sizes and functions, providing cross-sector insight and leadership.

Representing			
Small Agencies	MoD – Melanie Childs	SFO – Vanessa Wright	HUD – Emily Scarlett
Medium Agencies	Customs NZ – Rachael Mason	DOC – Harry Maher	NZTE – Jason Hare
Large Agencies	MPI – Jeanette McKeogh	MBIE – Dave Griffith	Kāinga Ora – Tarniya Comrie
Emergency Response / Defence	NZ Police – Mel Aitken		

Areas discussed

1. Fatigue and change saturation is of ongoing concern, as is increasing, ongoing aggression toward public sector workers. Agencies are actively reviewing their Critical Risk frameworks, with specific focus areas including lone work, commuting risks, fatigue, aggression and international deployments. External reviews are informing improvements and prompting realignment.
2. H&S Legislative reform uncertainty - Acknowledging that the reforms may not materially improve outcomes but also that while legislative tools are useful, organisational safety maturity often depends more on leadership, systems and culture than regulation alone. Noted that there was general support for an increasing focus and definition of Critical Risk.
3. Governance ownership and role clarity - Several agencies are revisiting the governance model for H&S, working to reposition the senior leadership team as active owners rather than passive recipients of committee advice. They are being supported to shift from compliance-focused oversight to strategic ownership of health, safety and wellbeing outcomes. Some agencies are simplifying engagement pathways to strengthen the connection between H&S Reps and senior governance. In some cases, layers have been removed so that frontline voices are directly influencing leadership decision-making.
4. Continuing focus on mental health - agencies are seeing increased EAP usage and usage in different areas to usual, such as around career anxiety and personal relationships. Some agencies are increasing leadership training for mental health issues and developing wrap around support services. This includes mental health literacy, resilience building and neurodiversity awareness.
5. Performance and Reporting Improvements - Several agencies are evolving their reporting systems to better support insight into high-potential incidents and positive safety observations. There's increasing interest in clearly defining functional roles and responsibilities within the system. Along with developing role-based H&S training that is tailored to function rather than generic or team-based models.
6. GHSL updates –
 - a. Early in Careers training course is struggling – Lance will shortly advise Impac to open to the public, if numbers aren't reached.
 - b. GHSL continues to seek new members, to enrich the experience and knowledge of the member group and keep costs down. Please feel free to make referrals.