

## Environment Scan:



Health and Safety Matters, provides Tier Two (T2) Leaders with HSW responsibilities a snapshot of recent events and changes across health, safety, and wellbeing (HSW). It's designed to be a resource to be shared, discussed, support conversation and discussion, and prompt assurance and critical questions at governance level such as - "Are we confident our systems prevent harm?" "How do we know our controls are working?" "Where could similar failures occur in our system"?

The scan highlights any new or useful guidance, resources, and tools to be aware of, such as the Safe-Gov app, which turns your recordable insights, observations, and reflections into evidence, demonstrates simple habits that keep your attention to health and safety active, informed, and ongoing—not passive or assumed. For further information on how we can support our senior leaders, please visit our website or email Lance Goodall at [lance.goodall@mpi.govt.nz](mailto:lance.goodall@mpi.govt.nz)

## TIER 2 HSW LEADERS PROGRAMME

The programme started in March with a breakfast session featuring Sir Brian Roche, Public Sector Commissioner who spoke on the current state, direction, and challenges facing the Public Service. The session was well received with 34 senior leaders attending with high engagement. The session reinforced how valuable it is for our leaders to hear directly from system leaders and regulators.

Upcoming sessions include:

- **11 August** - Sharon Thompson, Chief Executive Officer, WorkSafe New Zealand
- **23 September** - Rebecca Keoghan, Chair - Fire and Emergency New Zealand
- **22 October** - Dave Gawn, Chief Executive Officer, National Emergency Management Agency.

If you are interested in hosting or co-hosting a T2 event, please contact Lance.

## SAFEGUARD FINALIST

We are pleased to be recognised as finalist in the New Zealand H&S Awards (Governance category) for our digital leadership initiatives, the GHSL H&S Resource Hub and Safe-Gov mobile app. [A copy of our nomination is available,](#)

We would like to congratulate our fellow public sector finalists, including New Zealand Police, New Zealand Transport Agency, Ministry for Primary Industries and Zung Mai (Plunket, and a former ex-GHSL Intern) in the Emerging Leader category. Many congratulations to all the other finalists, working toward better H&S performance and outcomes.

## ONGOING EMERGING ISSUE: WORKPLACE AGGRESSION

ShopCare, a charitable trust, working in conjunction with KPMG and ACC, has commissioned the [first national workplace customer aggression survey](#). This reflects the growing concerns around the increase of violence and aggressive behaviour towards staff who deal with the public as part of their job.

The survey is open to anyone in a public facing role, takes 5 minutes to complete and is open until 21 June 2026.

The survey results will provide evidence of the extent and nature of the issue and be used to build a national picture, which can then be used to develop an approach to reducing incidences of workplace aggression and improving health, safety, and wellbeing outcomes for all workers.

Interestingly, this aligns with report findings recently published by the [New Zealand Medical Journal](#) of the impact of violence in the healthcare system and calls for a nationwide approach towards improved national data.

# AROUND THE SECTOR



An overview of recent cases, decisions, system weakness, gaps and industry issues from New Zealand, Australia and further abroad to support learning and reflection. Leaders are encouraged to consider how the lessons could be applied in the organisational context and what assurance they would expect to see.

## Only Ourselves to Blame → How systems thinking shapes outcomes

This article by Craig Marriot challenges leaders to look beyond individual error and examine how organisational systems create the conditions for failure. Incidents are rarely isolated acts; they reflect broader decisions about priorities, resourcing, and design. True operational excellence comes from building systems that make safe outcomes easier and unsafe outcomes harder. It asks executives to think about:

- Failures are typically system-driven, not just individual error.
- Leadership decisions shape the conditions people work within.
- A focus on blame can mask deeper organisational weaknesses.
- Improving safety requires proactive system-based design thinking.

**A reflection point:** “Where might our system design be quietly driving the very risks, we are trying to eliminate?”

[Read the full article from Craig Marriot](#)

## Oranga Tamariki case → What happens when leadership behaviour undermines culture

GYN v Oranga Tamariki – Serious misconduct case (ERA decision summary)

This case highlights how a senior leader’s bullying and intimidating behaviour created a culture where staff felt unsafe to speak up. Concerns were only raised when the leader was absent, revealing a lack of psychological safety.

The Employment Relations Authority found the conduct amounted to serious misconduct, resulting in loss of trust and the inability to continue in a leadership role.

### Key takeaways from this case are:

- Leadership behaviour directly shapes psychological safety and speak-up culture.
- Bullying and intimidation suppress risk visibility and delay escalation.
- Loss of trust can undermine leadership legitimacy entirely.
- Integrity and respectful conduct are foundational to effective leadership and safety.

**A reflection point:** “What measures do we have to confirm speaking up is safe in practice? How effectively do we test what we are told?”

**[Public Service Commission \(PSC\) Speaking Up model standards and Your Complaint, Your](#)**

[Read the full ERA decision](#)

## What good governance thinking looks like → Due Diligence expectations

The recent High Court decision in the appeal of Tony Gibson versus Maritime NZ has reinforced that directors and senior leaders must actively exercise due diligence under the Health and Safety at Work Act. It emphasises that governance is not passive and leaders must seek out critical information, test its reliability and ensure risks are effectively understood and managed.

The ruling makes clear that simply relying on management reporting is insufficient; robust questioning, verification, and ongoing oversight are essential to demonstrate leadership accountability.

### Key takeaways

- Due diligence requires active inquiry, not passive receipt of information.
- Boards must test and challenge assurance, not assume it is accurate.
- Governance decisions directly influence system effectiveness and safety outcomes.
- Leaders need visibility of how risk is actually managed in practice, not just on paper.

**A reflection point:** “If a critical safety failure happened tomorrow, what evidence would demonstrate that the right questions were asked, and the answers were acted on?”

[Read the full Dentons/loD article](#)

# AROUND THE SECTOR



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## Fifteen years after Pike River: Time for leadership on workplace health and safety?

Fifteen years after the Pike River mine disaster killed 29 men, Aotearoa New Zealand's workplace health and safety record remains poor, with fatality and injury rates among the highest in the developed world. Despite reforms following Pike River, including the creation of WorkSafe in 2013 and the Health and Safety at Work Act in 2015, NZ continues to record twice as many workplace deaths as Australia and four times as many as the United Kingdom, per capita. Workplace injuries and illnesses cost the country an estimated \$5 billion each year.

This article argues that unlimited fines for serious offences could signal the lives and wellbeing of workers are taken seriously and that effective workplace health and safety is also good for business performance and productivity.

[Read the full Public Health Communication Centre Aotearoa article](#)

## New Te Kaha Stadium build completed with no major harm incidents

WorkSafe NZ are hailing the construction safety record of the new stadium which was completed with no incidents of major harm across a three-year construction period, demonstrating what proactive health and safety management can achieve on a large, complex build.

At its peak, the project involved around 400 workers across multiple trades, operating at different stages and heights.

High-risk work included a foundation pour using 117 truckloads of concrete in a single morning, and installation of the roof structure 48 metres above ground.

[Read the full WorkSafe article](#)

## NSW employer loses bid to declare psychosocial rules unworkable

A March 2026 NSW Industrial Relations Commission decision confirmed that employers cannot avoid psychosocial safety obligations by claiming the rules are too complex, and that workplace investigations themselves must be treated as a psychosocial risk.

The case arose when a long-serving school employee was subjected to a 10 month misconduct investigation, reassigned to menial duties, and experienced significant mental health decline. SafeWork NSW issued improvement notices citing systemic failures in how the investigation was managed.

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The Commission found that deficiencies such as excessive delays, poor communication, and inappropriate alternate duties were not just procedural issues but breaches of psychosocial risk management obligations.

Ultimately, the ruling reinforces that just having policies is insufficient; leaders must ensure systems are consistently applied, monitored, and designed with employee wellbeing in mind, especially during high stress processes like investigations.

### Key takeaways

- Psychosocial obligations are enforceable, not optional
- Employers cannot rely on ambiguity or complexity in regulations to avoid compliance — psychosocial safety duties are clear and binding.
- One case can reveal a system-wide failure
- The Commission confirmed that a single employee's experience can justify regulatory action where it exposes broader flaws in organisational systems of work.
- Poorly managed investigations are themselves recognised risks that must be actively controlled, not just administratively managed.

**A Reflection point:** Are our processes fit for purpose in practice—or just on paper?

[Read the full Hamilton Locke article](#)

# INSIGHTS AND RESOURCES

Current resources and insights from experts on health and safety.



## Directors resource: Five key health and safety actions

This one page resource by HSE Global outlines five practical actions directors may want to consider to improve health and safety governance.

It focuses on building knowledge, understanding how work is actually performed and ensuring robust systems are in place to manage critical risks.

The guidance is designed to help boards move beyond compliance and take a more proactive, informed approach to health and safety oversight.

[Access to Directors resource via IoD page](#)

## Relevant resources

1. [State of a thriving nation 2025 report - Outlines the cost of poor HS practices cost NZ \\$5.4 billion in 2024](#)
2. [Reporting for Governance and Executive Leadership Guidance](#)

## AI: Work intensification risk

**New research reported in the Harvard Business Review shows AI tools don't necessarily lighten workloads, they can potentially intensify them, creating hidden psychosocial risks.**

An eight-month study at a US tech company found employers took on more tasks and extended their workday because AI made "doing more" feel both possible and rewarding. This self-driven acceleration led to workload creep: workers took on tasks previously belonging to other roles or which would have been outsourced, deferred or avoided, entered prompts through breaks and multitasked across multiple AI-supported threads, eroding recovery time and leading to "silent intensification" of work.

Researchers from the University of California Berkeley's Haas School of Business say this increased pace and expanded scope may be welcomed by leaders seeking efficiency gains, but over time it fuels cognitive overload, burnout, decision fatigue and a sense of being perpetually "on".

The researchers warn companies must adopt intentional AI-use standards, such as protected pauses and limits, to prevent these harms from becoming the new baseline of work.

[Read the full Harvard Business Review article](#)

## Psychosocial risks are a "wicked problem"

This article describes psychosocial risks as "wicked problems\*" because they are complex, interconnected, and difficult to solve with a single fix, often arising from overlapping organisational factors rather than one clear cause.

Unlike traditional safety risks, they are less visible and harder to address, leading many organisations to struggle with assigning responsibility due to the broad range of categories psychosocial hazards fall under and then not moving beyond simply identifying issues to implementing meaningful change.

It also asks the question, 'What exactly are psychosocial risks compared to "traditional" health and safety risks, and how do we address them?'

[Read the Umbrella full article](#)