BENCHMARK GENSUITE®

The EHS Pressure Point:
Rising Complexity, Shrinking Resources, and the Shift to AI

2026

EHS Benchmarking Report

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Executive Summary

EHS professionals are navigating more responsibilities than ever. Between a shifting regulatory landscape, mounting operational pressure, shrinking teams and rising risk, there are increased expectations with fewer resources.

To understand the state of workplace safety, Benchmark Gensuite surveyed more than 260 EHS professionals across industries about the challenges shaping safety performance and solutions for overcoming complexity.

The 2026 EHS Benchmarking Report paints a stark picture. Workplace injuries are rising at more than twice last year's rate. Incident underreporting has climbed to 90%. Lastly, ESG and compliance responsibilities continue to expand despite stagnant resources.
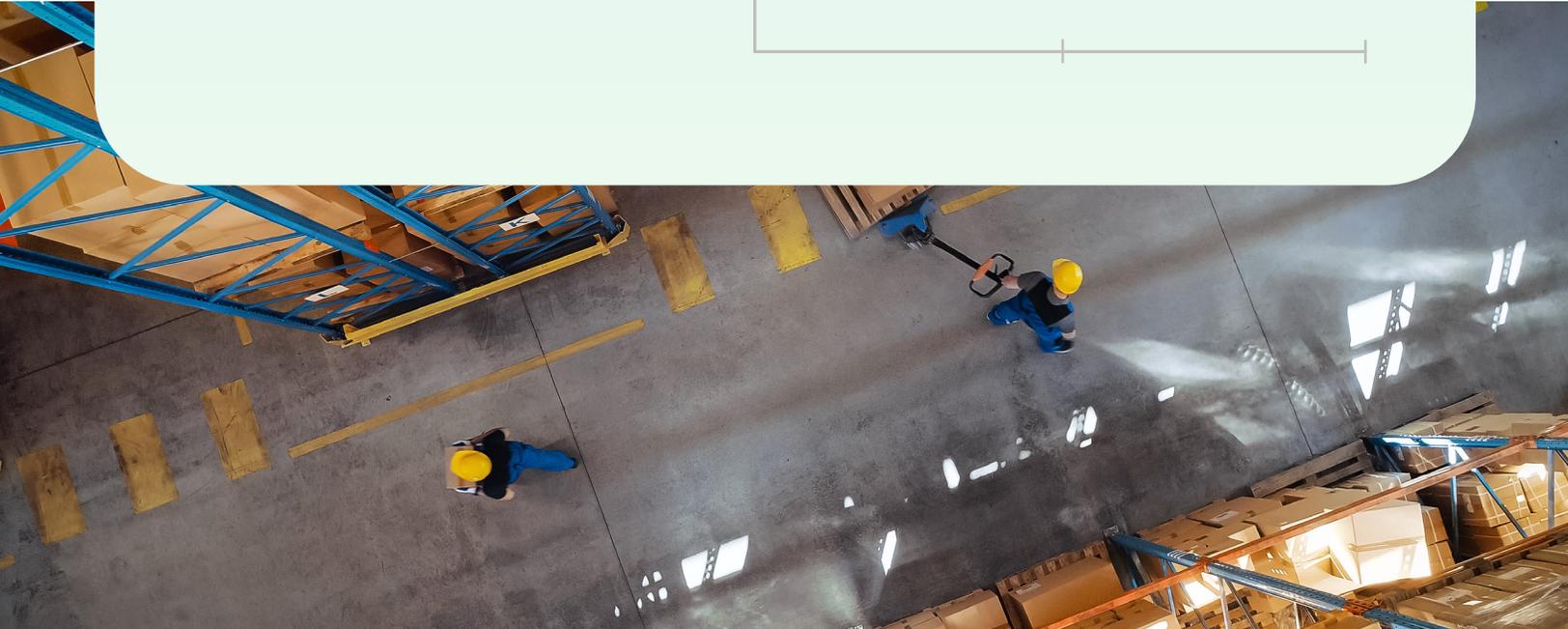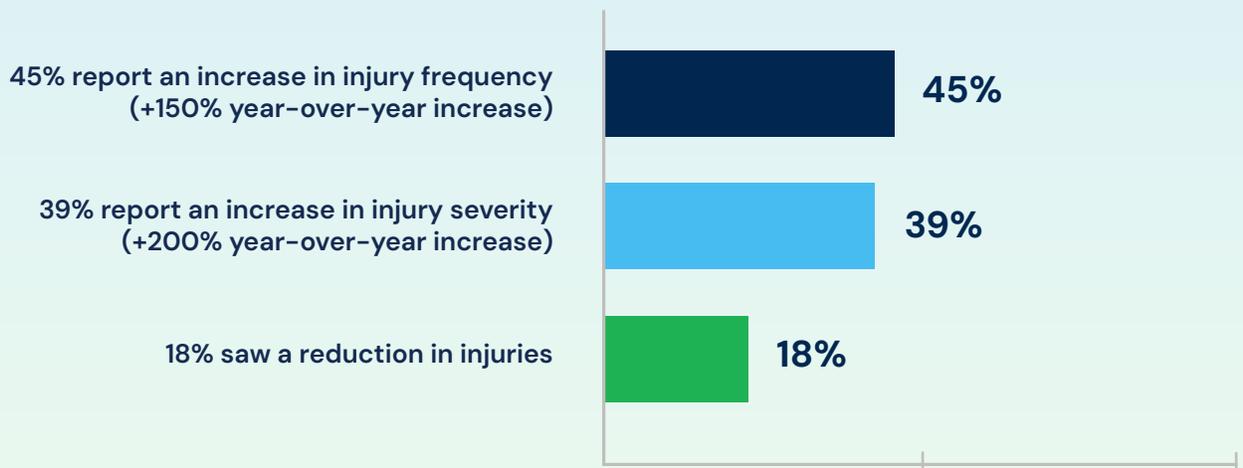
But the data also highlights a path forward. AI adoption is accelerating rapidly, emerging as a critical tool to automate reporting, strengthen compliance, and provide predictive insights that help teams do more with less. By understanding the factors affecting the EHS landscape and how forward–thinking organizations are building resilient programs, leaders can protect their people, reduce risk, and stay ahead of evolving expectations in 2026.

Workplace Safety:
A Growing Concern

For the second straight year, safety performance is slipping. **Almost half** (45%) of respondents say injury frequency increased over the past 12 months, compared to just 18% last year. Injury severity follows a similar pattern: 39% report an increase, up from 13% the previous year. Fewer than one in five (18%) experienced any reduction in injuries.

Safety Systems Are Under Strain

Injury frequency and severity climbed 2–3x year-over-year

45% report an increase in injury frequency (+150% year–over–year increase)	**45%**
39% report an increase in injury severity (+200% year–over–year increase)	**39%**
18% saw a reduction in injuries	**18%**

Operational Strain Is Compounding Existing Safety Gaps

The 2024 vs. 2025 comparison data indicates that operational strain is now layered on top of persistent workforce and training gaps. Increased demand (44%), workforce issues (42%), time shortages (33%), and insufficient training (32%) continue to fuel incident risk. Visibility challenges persist as well: one in five cite visibility issues, and 13% say inadequate technology limits their ability to identify risks.

Drivers of Workplace Injuries: 2024 vs. 2025

2024

Workforce Issues — 55%

Insufficient Training — 34%

Time & Manpower Shortages — 31%

Increased Demand — 25%

Feedback & Reporting Issues — 20%

2025

Workforce Issues — 42%

Insufficient Training — 32%

Time & Manpower Shortages — 33%

Increased Demand — 44%

Feedback & Reporting Issues — 26%
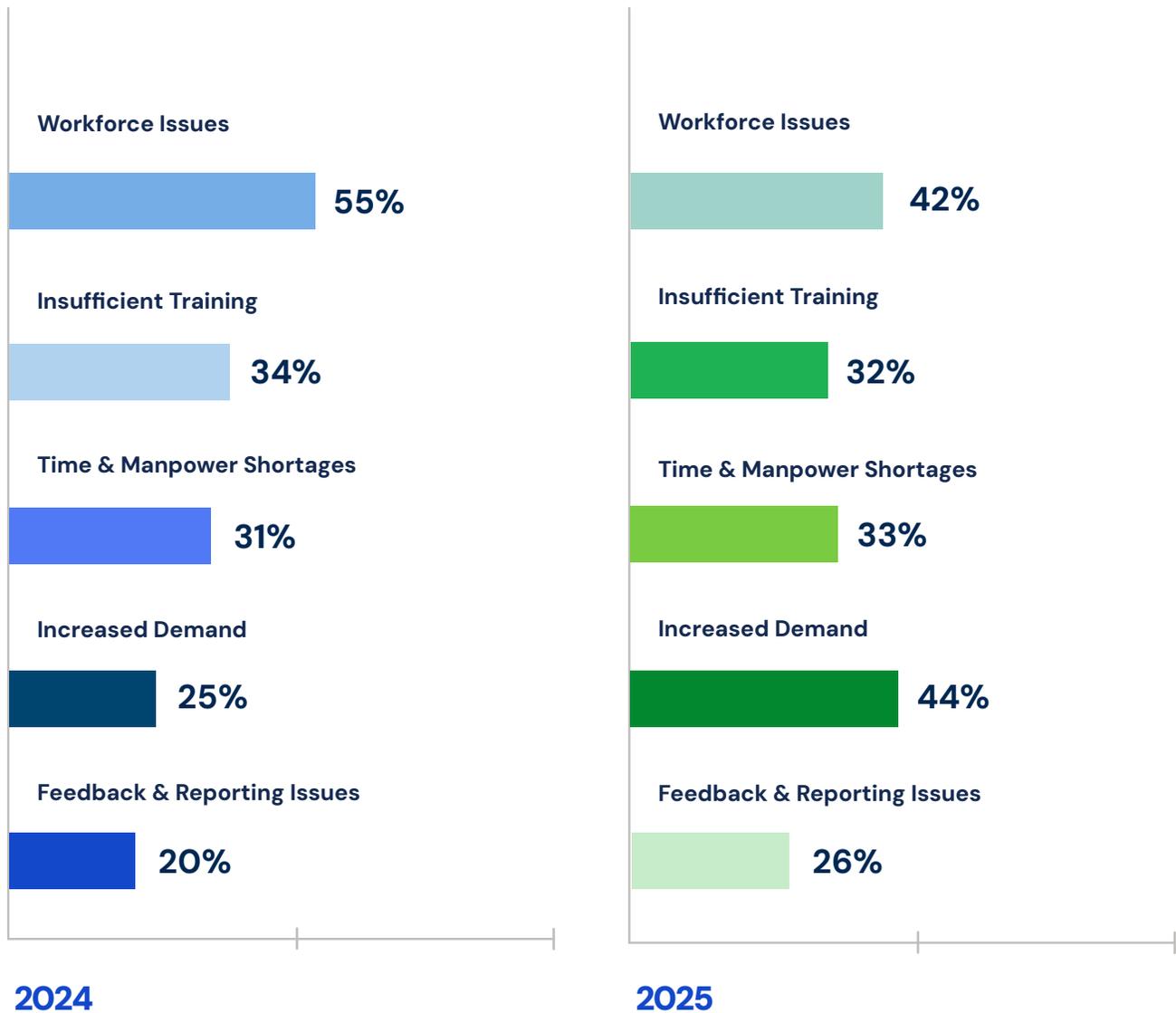
Compliance Pressure:
Underreporting Reaches Critical Levels

As injuries rise, compliance challenges are intensifying. Nearly half (48%) of EHS leaders say shifting regulations across global markets are the top trend influencing their strategy this year. Forty percent report they are falling behind on compliance as rapid regulatory change outpaces the people and systems needed to manage it.

To make matters more complex, 50% say they have taken on additional data collection and reporting to stakeholders – effectively cementing the EHS function as the compliance command center. Another 40% note that a central executive function or executive team has taken greater ownership of environmental and operational governance, increasing expectations for robust, audit-ready EHS and governance data.

Meanwhile, transparency continues to erode. Underreporting has risen significantly, with **90% saying workplace incidents, hazards, or near misses are going underreported** – up from 79% last year.

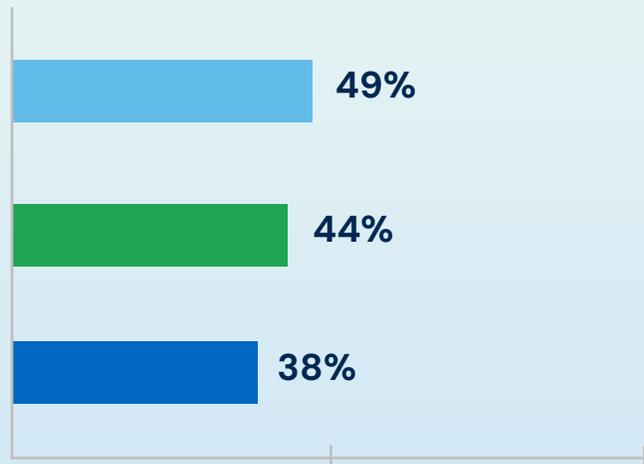### Underreporting Is Rising

79%   90%

2024   2025
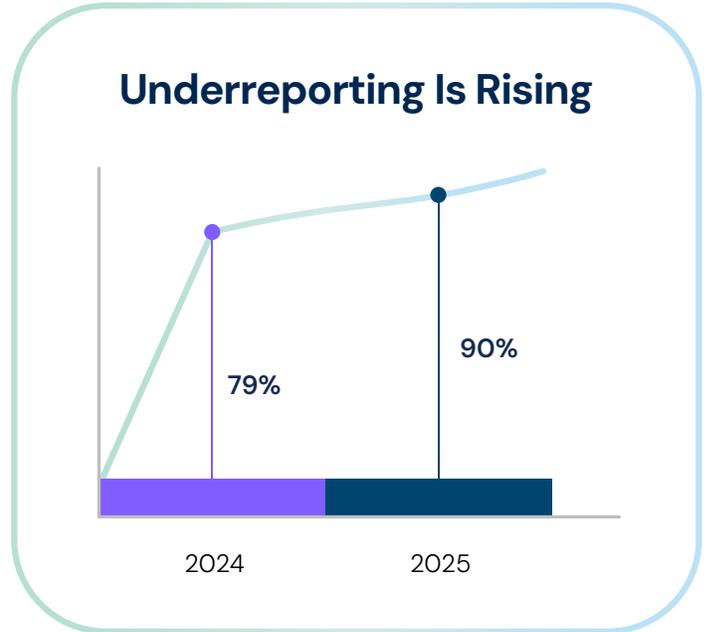
Why Workers Don't Report Incidents

49% say employees hesitate to report due to perceived obstacles or challenges (time required, insufficient systems, tedious process) — **49%**

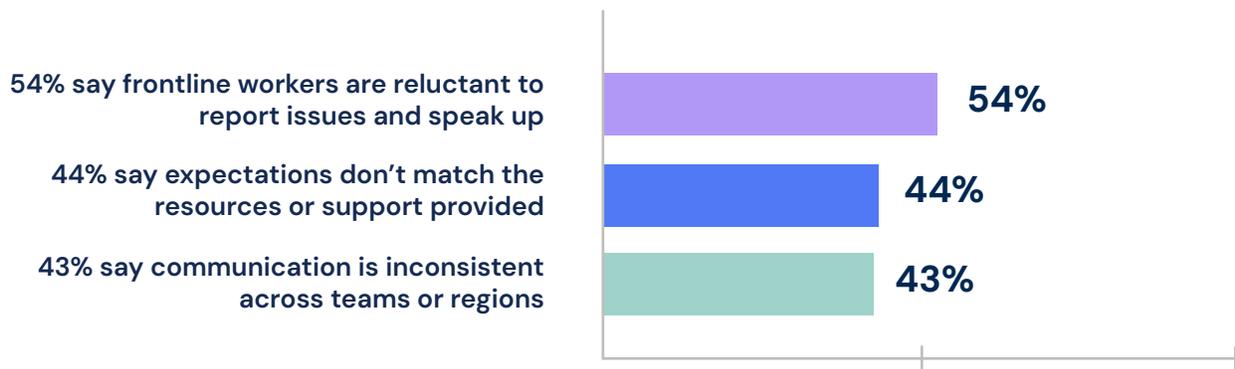44% cite a reliance on manual processes like paper, email, or verbal reporting — **44%**

38% cite concerns around confidentiality or fear of backlash — **38%**

These barriers don't just suppress reporting—they create a significant visibility gap between leaders and the frontline. 39% of EHS leaders say they're missing early risk signals—such as near-misses or worker feedback—that could prevent more serious incidents or regulatory issues down the line.
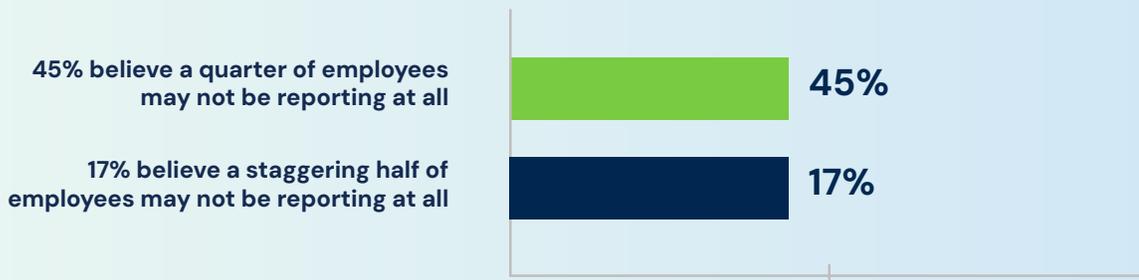
Nearly half (45%) estimate that up to a quarter of employees don't report incidents, up significantly from last year's 32%. This gap is contributing to a growing disconnect between leaders and the frontline:

The Frontline Reporting Gap

54% say frontline workers are reluctant to report issues and speak up	**54%**
44% say expectations don't match the resources or support provided	**44%**
43% say communication is inconsistent across teams or regions	**43%**

As regulatory scrutiny grows and workforces evolve, underreporting is no longer just a safety challenge – it is a compliance risk.

Estimated Scale of Incident Underreporting

45% believe a quarter of employees may not be reporting at all	**45%**
17% believe a staggering half of employees may not be reporting at all	**17%**

Expanded Responsibilities:
EHS Leaders are Stretched Thin

EHS leaders are absorbing new strategic responsibilities faster than resources, systems, and roles are evolving.

Aside from workplace injuries and compliance complexity, teams now manage ESG reporting, sustainability workstreams, operational resilience, and total worker health.

Sustainability Tops the List of Emerging Pressures.

Despite economic uncertainty and political debate, sustainability remains the top challenge making EHS roles harder (39%), surpassing even regulatory pressure and labor shortages (both 36%).

- 46% said their EHS team has taken on additional oversight for reporting, compliance, or cross-functional collaboration work tied to environmental and governance expectations.
- 26% say these responsibilities have grown without additional resources.

39% of EHS leaders say sustainability is the top challenge making their roles harder—surpassing regulatory pressure and labor shortages.

Emergency Preparedness Gains Urgency

With climate, cyber, and supply chain disruptions becoming more frequent, EHS is also emerging as a resilience partner across the organization.

- 52% of teams have updated or expanded emergency response plans to address a broader range of risks (supply chain issues, cyber incidents, extreme weather events, and facility disruptions) in light of increasing operational risks and potential disruptions.
- 27% say their emergency management and response responsibilities have grown, even if formal plans haven't fully caught up.

52% of EHS teams have updated or expanded emergency response plans to address a broader range of operational risks.

Total Worker Health Becomes Strategic

Safety is no longer defined solely by physical risk. Organizations are increasingly recognizing the role of mental, emotional, and operational wellbeing in preventing incidents.

This shift is already translating into planned investment and action across EHS programs:

- 49% offer training to reduce stigma and increase safety culture around wellbeing.
- 45% use fatigue risk monitoring or shift management.
- 44% provide mental health or stress-management resources.

49% of EHS leaders plan to increase focus or investment in total worker health and wellness in the next 12 months.

Limited Resources:
Teams are Doing More with Less

Expanding responsibilities, staffing shortages, overtime, and reliance on contract labor are increasing fatigue, burnout, and safety risk across organizations.

Meanwhile, more than one-third (35%) of EHS leaders report feeling fatigue, stress, or burnout themselves, revealing the strain is shared across every level of the safety function.

> Lack of budget, people, and support is the number one concern keeping EHS leaders up at night.

How EHS Resource Constraints Are Showing Up

- **44%** cite lack of budget, headcount, or executive support as the number one EHS-related challenge keeping them up at night.

- **45%** say staffing shortages have increased pressure on existing workers, raising the risk of incidents.

- **42%** report increased workloads or mandatory overtime are contributing to worker fatigue and burnout.

- **41%** say reliance on seasonal or contract workers has made it harder to maintain consistent safety standards.

Emerging Workforce Risk:

17% say immigration or deportation-related issues are contributing to instability in the workforce — a less visible but growing factor that further complicates staffing and safety continuity.

Technology Lags Behind:
Increased Pressure on Short–Staffed Teams

As organizations collect more safety and operational data, many EHS teams lack the modern tools required to transform information into meaningful action. The result: a growing divide between the volume of data available and the systems needed to analyze, interpret, and leverage it.

This year's data shows that technology maturity remains uneven across the industry.

Current Technology Adoption Across EHS Teams

47% rely on employee surveys, feedback, and reporting to collect and track EHS data to create a safer workplace.

46% use enterprise software platforms.

38% leverage mobile devices or apps.

37% still rely heavily on manual and spreadsheet management.

16% use outdated technology solutions.

Without advanced tools – from automated workflows to data analytics – EHS teams remain stuck in reactive mode, spending valuable time locating information rather than acting on it. As responsibilities expand and resources remain tight, the inability to streamline core processes puts additional strain on already overwhelmed teams.

AI Emerges as the Solution to EHS's Biggest Problems

As the pressures facing EHS intensify, AI is quickly transitioning from an experimental capability to an essential accelerant of safety and compliance performance. This year's survey results show a decisive move toward AI–powered tools that relieve workload strain, automate repetitive tasks, improve reporting quality, and strengthen early risk detection.

92% of EHS leaders are using generative AI in their day–to–day EHS work. Eighty-six percent are using agentic AI, demonstrating widespread adoption across the sector.

In contrast, last year, 28% said their organizations were planning to prioritize AI solutions that incorporate GenAI capabilities over the next 12 months.

Top Gen AI Use Cases in EHS

Use Case	Percentage
50% summarize incidents or near–miss reports	50%
48% support compliance documentation or audit preparation	48%
48% create visual content (dashboards, infographics, and safety)	48%

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Top Agentic AI Use Cases in EHS

44% are using it for predictive insights and automated alerts based on leading indicators or behavioral data

44%

37% are using it for smart workflows that triage reports and suggest next steps

37%

33% are using it for AI-guided decision support for real-time risk identification and response
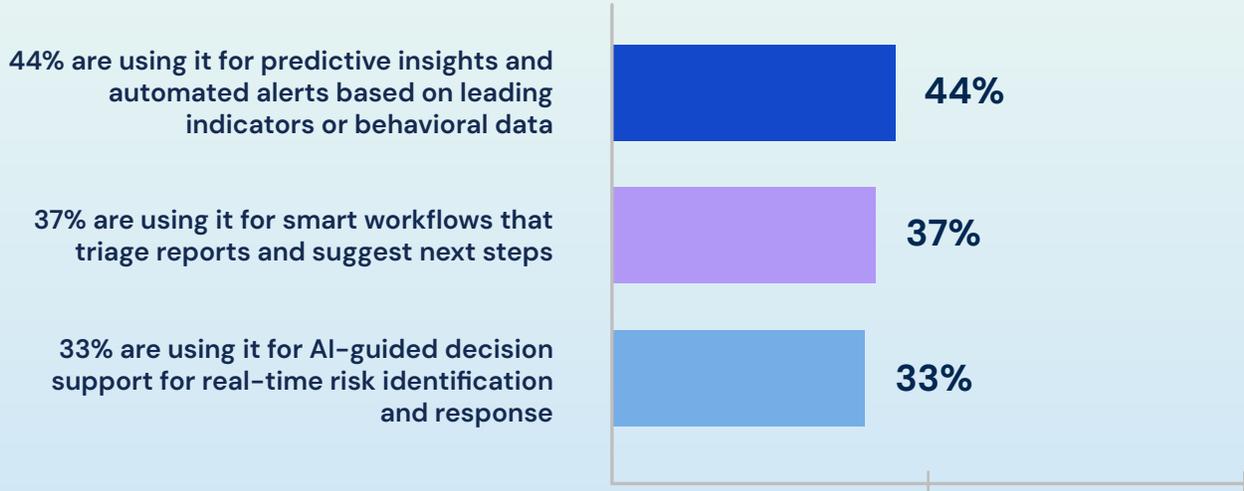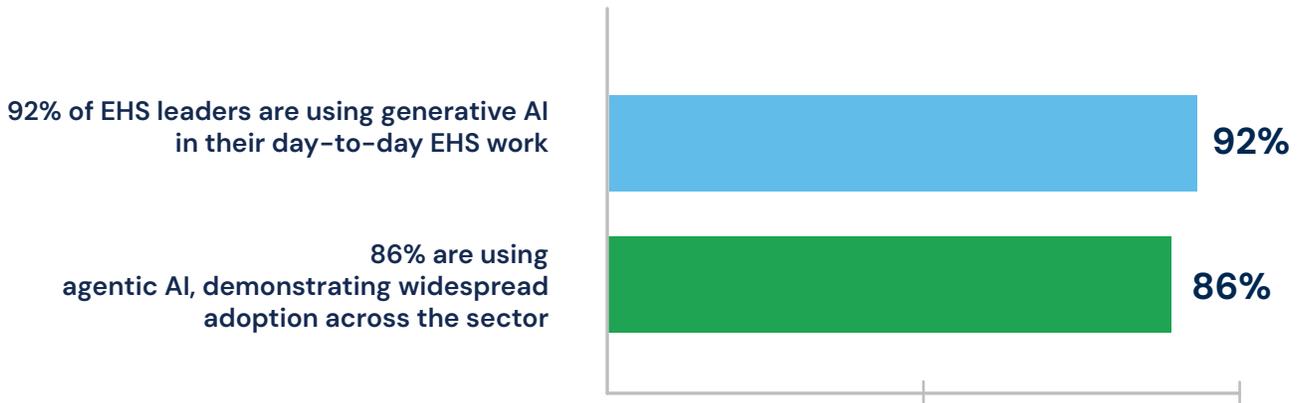
33%

AI Adoption Has Accelerated Rapidly Across EHS

92% of EHS leaders are using generative AI in their day-to-day EHS work

92%

86% are using agentic AI, demonstrating widespread adoption across the sector

86%

Just last year, only 28% of EHS leaders said their organizations planned to prioritize AI solutions with GenAI capabilities.

Together, these tools represent a powerful shift toward proactive, data-driven safety management. They give EHS teams the ability to identify patterns earlier, respond faster, and operate with greater clarity and efficiency. As organizations grapple with shortages of skilled workers, the weight of expanding ESG and compliance demands, and the need for more resilient safety systems, AI offers a scalable way to fill gaps without requiring equivalent increases in headcount or resources.

Closing Takeaways for EHS Leaders

The findings of the 2026 EHS Benchmarking Report make one thing clear: today's safety landscape is more complex, demanding, and interconnected than ever before. Injury rates are rising, compliance expectations are intensifying, underreporting continues to obscure early warning signals, and EHS teams are being stretched across a widening set of priorities.

To navigate this crossroads – and build safer, more resilient operations – organizations should focus on three critical actions:

1. **Strengthen early risk detection with modern tools.**
Traditional reporting systems can no longer keep pace with the realities of today's workplace. EHS leaders must move toward integrated platforms, mobility-enabled reporting, and predictive analytics that make it easier to spot trends early and intervene proactively.

2. **Prioritize a people-powered and tech-enabled safety culture.**
From workforce shortages to burnout affecting both employees and leaders, organizations need to invest in wellbeing, return-to-work practices, fatigue management, and total worker health. Effective safety culture is no longer just about policy – it requires engagement, support, and trust.

3. **Embrace AI to expand capacity and accelerate impact.**
AI will play a defining role in the next generation of EHS performance. By automating compliance tasks, improving reporting quality, and enabling predictive risk identification, AI allows teams to operate with greater speed and sophistication – without requiring increases in staffing.

Organizations that take a proactive, technology-enabled approach will be best positioned to reduce injuries, maintain compliance, and manage the rising pressures of a rapidly evolving operating environment.

About Benchmark Gensuite

Benchmark Gensuite® delivers AI–forward, best–in–class digital EHS, Sustainability, Quality, and Risk solutions for global enterprises. Powered by a single–version, cloud–based platform and enriched by a rapidly expanding suite of generative AI tools, Benchmark Gensuite empowers more than 4 million users across industries to proactively manage risk, ensure compliance, and accelerate performance. With over two decades of domain expertise, award–winning customer service, and a commitment to continuous innovation, Benchmark Gensuite is the trusted partner for organizations seeking both operational excellence and strategic impact. For more information, visit benchmarkgensuite.com

The respondent demographics below highlight the breadth of roles and organization sizes represented in the 2026 EHS Benchmarking Survey.

Role:

Corporate Officer	Vice President	Director	Senior Manager	Manager	Coordinator/ Specialist	Consultant
11%	7%	23%	15%	25%	16%	3%

Company Size:

- Less than $150 million in revenue: 25%
- $150 million – $500 million in revenue: 29%
- $500 million – $1 billion in revenue: 22%
- $1 billion – $5 billion in revenue: 15%
- $5 billion – $25 billion: 5%
- More than $25 billion: 3%