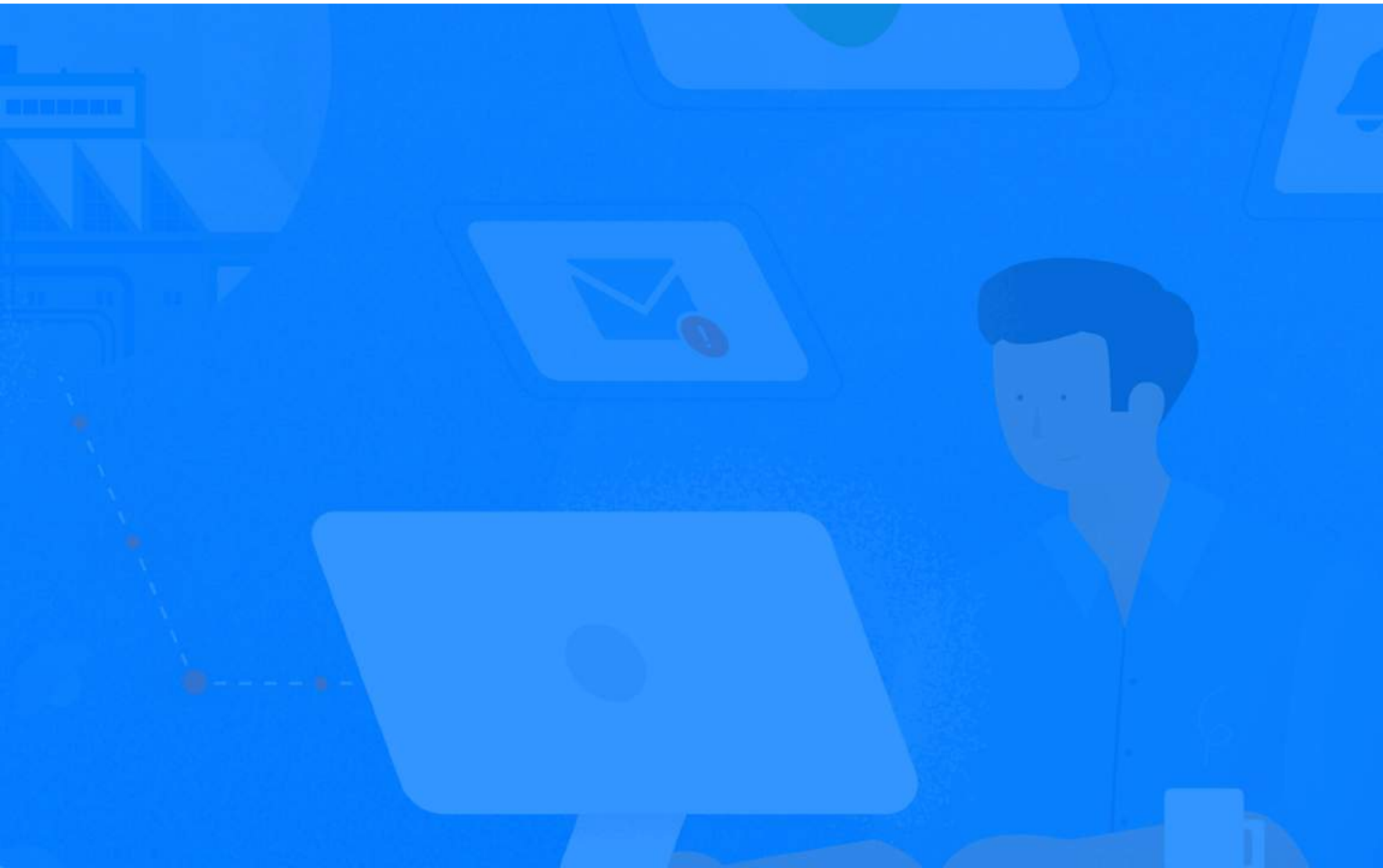


Outdated Contractor Management in a Post-Pandemic World

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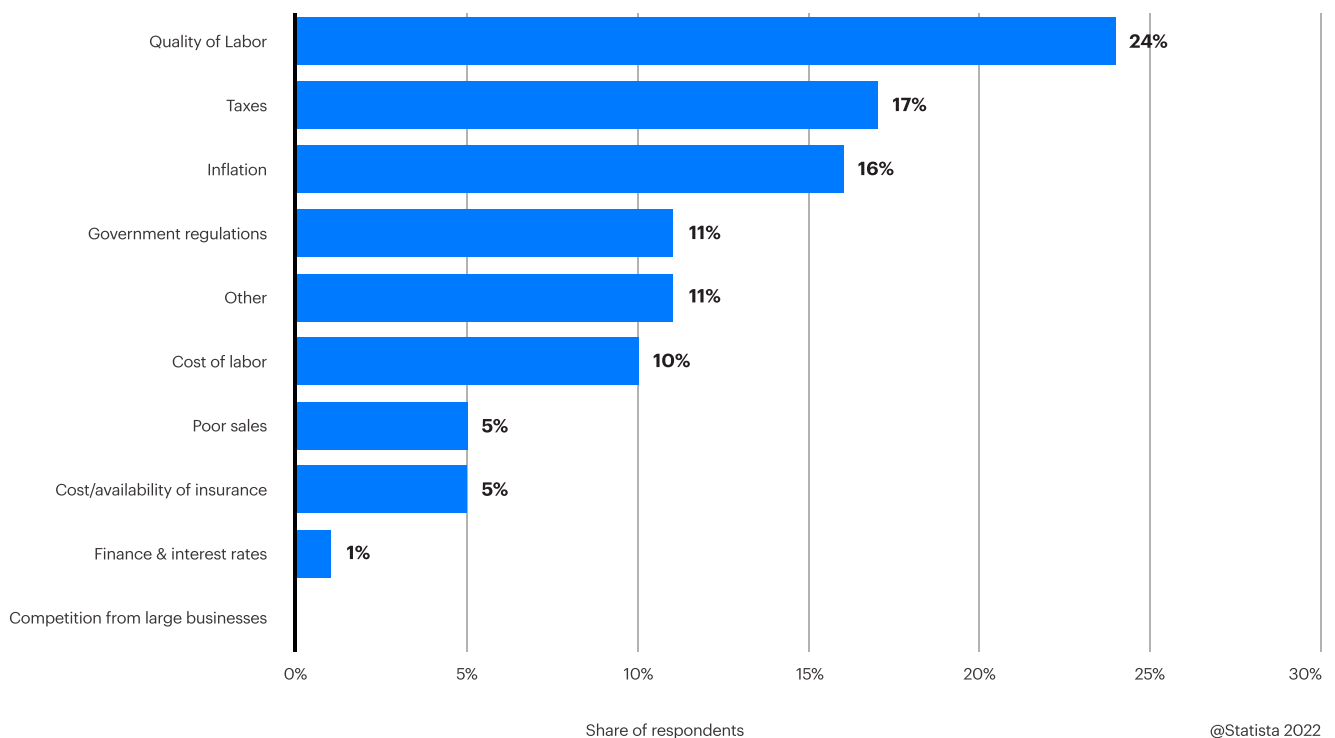


Introduction

Since OSHA was formed in the 1970s, businesses have relied on in-person courses to keep their employees and contractors in compliance with safety regulations. The primary source of these courses is the National Safety Council (NSC) which currently has 28 chapters in as many states.

In the 1980s and 1990s, in-person classes were the only place where contractors and workers could receive their OSHA-approved training. Limited testing locations traditionally made organizing, administering, recording, and tracking individual training progress complicated. But the quick rise of online education through the late 2010's has now made it possible for contractors and employees to complete training no matter where they are in relation to a jobsite.

A 2021 survey of more than 1,400 small businesses found that "quality of labor" is the number one issue they're currently facing. After adding in labor costs, as well, workforce staffing accounts for a third of all major problems



In-person identity verification is undoubtedly more effective than online verification, but it is not always a bulletproof method. As the economy continues to shift towards remote and contract work, new systems for verifying employee compliance will become available for companies to use.

The pandemic has challenged traditional methods of workforce onboarding, training, and development. While safety councils have been the main avenue for businesses to manage contractor compliance, they are quickly falling behind the needs of a modern, post-pandemic workforce.

The Traditional Safety Council Training Approach

The overall training experience has a significant impact on how businesses develop and maintain contractor relationships. From the tech sector to the construction industry, COVID has changed how businesses hire employees and contractors. Roughly 60% of businesses adapted their onboarding process during the COVID-19 pandemic, and they intend to continue these new processes moving forward. One of the most significant changes was the implementation of paperless onboarding.

Many contractors simply could not attend in-person OSHA training sessions during the height of the pandemic. The local safety councils that administered these courses had to either shut down or offer limited class sizes. This system, which already had many limitations, suddenly made it even more difficult for contractors to receive training before arriving to a jobsite.

Numerous safety councils, including the NSC, began offering some form of online training during the pandemic. Although this option addressed the immediate need for remote classes, it did not solve the underlying problems with old-fashioned training models. Aside from issues related to COVID restrictions, safety councils still present many outdated contractor management options for modern businesses.

Lack of Scalability within a Single Organization

Businesses need systems that they can scale to match future growth. This extends to all aspects of the operation—from the onboarding of new employees to the creation of new products. In industries like construction and manufacturing, the use of contractors allows a business to expand without overloading its internal system.

But getting various teams of contractors the safety training they need is more difficult than many businesses anticipate. Without a central contractor management system, site leaders must audit each contractor separately. This is cumbersome, and it limits how quickly contractors can start completing the work they were hired to do.

As an organization grows, the difficulty of tracking several contractor teams intensifies. Most businesses ultimately can't sustain this system without introducing some sort of training standard. For many, that means offering training from a local or nationally recognized safety council. While this may help in the short-term, it isn't an effective solution for tracking individual training progress.

Inconsistency Across Multiple Sites

Managing contractors who work at separate locations is difficult without an online training system. Part of the issue is that contractors in one region might receive completely different training than contractors in another region. This is common when large businesses rely on local safety council chapters for OSHA training requirements.

In this case, businesses would benefit from a standardized training program. The good news is that most contractors only need to complete basic safety training in order to enter a worksite. In other words, courses and modules aren't often complicated, so organizations may be able to find preexisting courses that they can offer to contractors in multiple states.

Difficult Oversight of Training Progression

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Because organizations don't have access to training materials, classes, etc., they also don't have direct access to contractor records. This makes it harder to track which contractors have completed which modules. Rather than going straight to the source, organizations must get verification from each individual contractor.

If a business is only working with one (or a few) contractors, this may not be a big issue. For global operations with multiple sites, however, this method is not effective. And when workers show up to a jobsite, cross-referencing their ID with training records may take longer than necessary.

1

The contract employer shall assure that each contract employee is trained in the work practices necessary to perform his/her job.

2

The contract employer shall assure that each contract employee is instructed in the known potential fire, explosion, or toxic release hazards related to his/her job and the process, and the applicable provisions of the emergency action plan.

3

The contract employer shall document that each contract employee has received and understood the required training and prepare a record which contains the identity of the contract employee, the date of training, and the means used to verify that the employee understood the training.

4

The contract employer shall assure that each contract employee follows the safety rules of the facility.

Limited Training Locations

In-person courses also have the limitation of physical access. Some contractors may not be located near a testing facility. This means that contractors may have to travel far (depending on organizational requirements) to get the training they need to start a job.

This is a major inconvenience for both contractors and businesses. The longer it takes contractors to get their OSHA-approved training, the more that operational costs rise. And inefficiencies like this can cost facilities tens of thousands of dollars per week in output delays.

Absence of Customizability

From a business perspective, traditional safety council training lacks customizability. If the training that contractors need to complete is relatively simple, this may not be an issue.

In some cases, however, contractors need to know safety information related to a specific process. If they go through a standard safety council course, these contractors won't get the vital information they need. This then requires a business to create its own training module anyway.

For larger organizations with established onboarding procedures and materials, safety council training is less than ideal. It often makes more sense for large organizations to administer and track their own training modules. This at least allows them to customize what types of information their contractors receive before starting work on a project.

What Should the Future of Contractor Management Look Like?

It is certain that businesses need a more efficient contract management system for administering, documenting, and tracking training. Safety councils provide familiarity, but they don't necessarily offer the convenience and flexibility that companies both expect and need in an increasingly remote world.

Many businesses have started to shift their OSHA recordkeeping, incident management, and safety training to online software platforms. These tools allow both large and small facilities to streamline their EHS documents and processes, making it easy to find trends that may lead to life-saving safety initiatives and protocols.

The challenge of remote contract management is that these resources are often scattered. This means that companies must combine multiple tools to move all their training materials online. Most contractors still rely heavily on safety councils and established organizations for mandatory training.

But current contractor management solutions do not supply the reliability and quality of training that organizations want. And when you consider the task of verifying who is attending a remote course, it's not hard to see why companies and contractors gravitate towards established safety council training options—even though this model is outdated.

Offsite Participant Verification

One of the biggest drawbacks of training contract workers remotely is that it is more difficult to verify their identities. The last thing any business wants is for workers to miss critical safety instructions and increase the likelihood of a major incident happening.

With in-person classes, you can complete simple checks using standard driver's license identification. New forms of contractor management technology will have to complete this verification process, but the question is "how?" The solution may be closer than it appears.

Apple is already working on developing a facial recognition system that works even when users are wearing face masks. This, of course, is a response to the pandemic need for improved ID verification techniques. And other forms of verification already exist.

Until advanced facial recognition technology becomes widely available, an effective approach would be to have students attend online classes with mandatory video participation. Many companies, such as Examity and Proctorio, provide proctoring services that ensure the integrity of online exams, certifications, and more.

Looking into the future of contractor management in a post-pandemic world, it's clear that organizations need a simpler way to administer and track OSHA-required training. The alternative to this is an outdated system that puts all the control into the hands of third-party organizations. And when it comes to OSHA compliance, businesses shouldn't have to rely on someone else to ensure that their contractors get the vital safety training they need.

