

Health & safety in the workplace today

Overcoming 4 top challenges.

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Table of contents

Preface 3

Executive summary 5

Challenge #1: Requirements for H&S competent persons are increasingly more complex 8

Challenge #2: Health and safety worries in remote working 14

Challenge #3: Safeguarding against stress and other threats to mental health 18

Challenge #4: Training must accommodate virtual - and diverse - needs 22

Conclusion 26

The Enhesa difference 27

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Preface.

Workplace health and safety has come a long way in protecting employees across the world. Since the adoption of EHS (environmental, health, and safety) programs and policies, the number of occupational injuries and deaths has been significantly reduced on a global level. Countless lives have been saved over the years. It's worth celebrating. But any EHS professional knows that there's always more work to be done.

EHS is constantly evolving. As new hazards emerge and requirements change, it's important for health and safety professionals to stay in the know and scale with the shifting regulatory landscape. In our work with multi-national organizations, we've seen firsthand the changing obstacles that companies must face to keep workers well - and helped them to find the right solution to overcome them.

We've developed this resource to help business leaders and EHS professionals face today's toughest challenges in protecting your workforce. From keeping track of specialist requirements to addressing new risks to adapting training to changing needs... staying on top of these trends is key to building and maintaining your most effective health and safety program. And key to keeping it that way as the times and tides change.

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EHS compliance saves countless lives.
But there's always more work to be done.

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Executive summary.

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Executive summary.

1. Requirements for OHS competent persons are increasingly more complex.

Approximately half of the world's countries require an occupational health and safety competent person in the workplace. The requirements keep getting more complicated, and more are likely to follow. The only way to keep your company compliant is to keep your eye on future changes.

2. Health and safety worries in remote working.

Before 2020, remote work wasn't prominent in our working world nor remotely our top priority in risk assessments. Fast forward to how working from home became more common – and therefore, related regulatory changes became more frequent. Even if your operating jurisdictions don't have official regulations around teleworking hazards, you'll need to include them in your risk assessments.

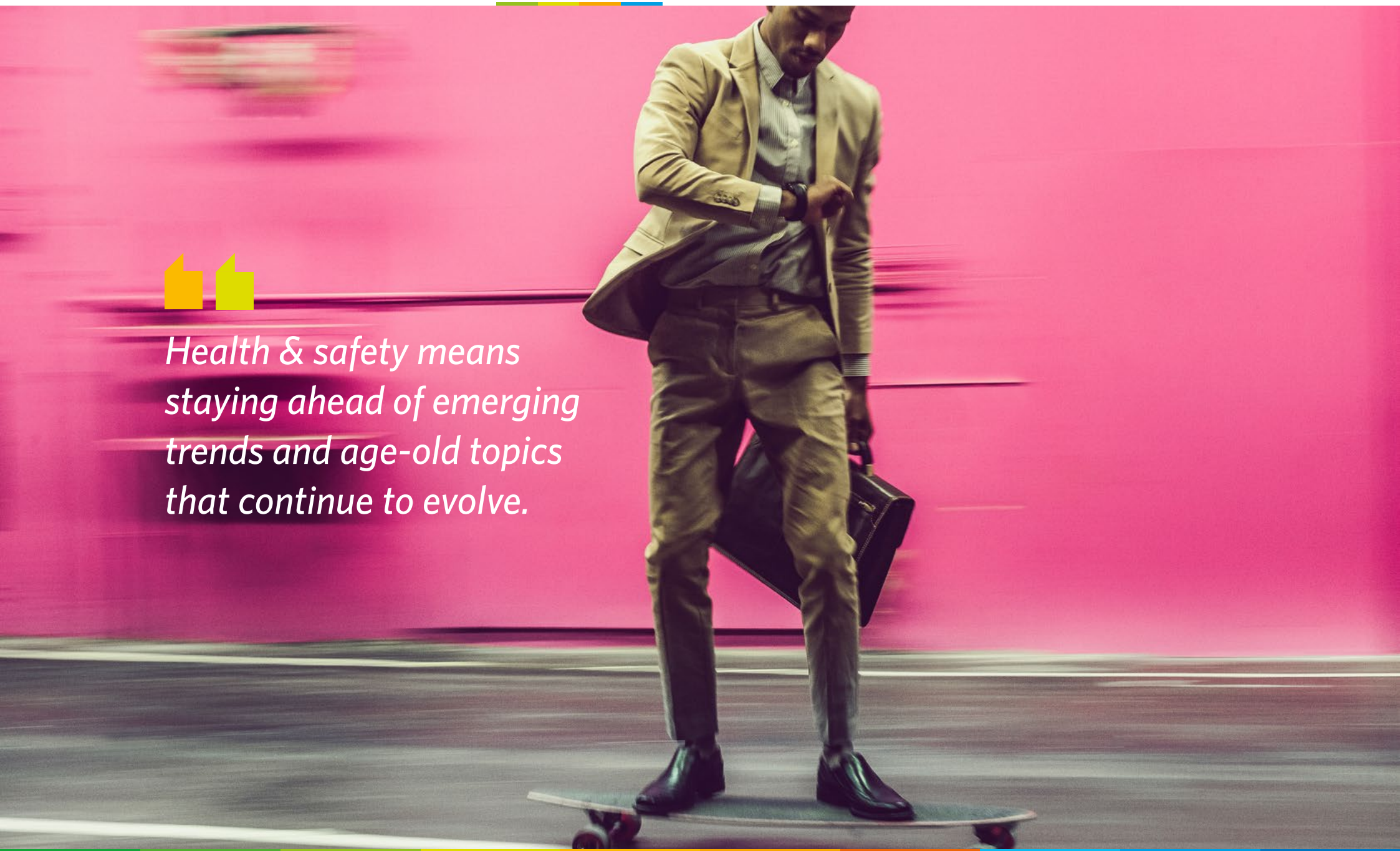
3. Safeguarding against stress and other threats to mental health.

Increased sick leave, burnout complaints, and high turnover ... the writing is on the wall, and it underlines the importance of protecting workers' mental well-being. As a result, we expect to see additional mental health legislation mandated through health and safety regulations. And your business might need to work harder to see exactly what risks lie within your facilities.

4. Training must accommodate virtual - and diverse - needs.

From generational differences to virtual vs. in-person learning preferences, providing adequate training now involves adapting the way you train to our modern world. Because there will never be no one-size-fits-all, you might find that social learning strikes the right balance across your workforce.

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Health & safety means staying ahead of emerging trends and age-old topics that continue to evolve.

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Challenge #1:

Requirements for OHS competent persons are increasingly more complex.

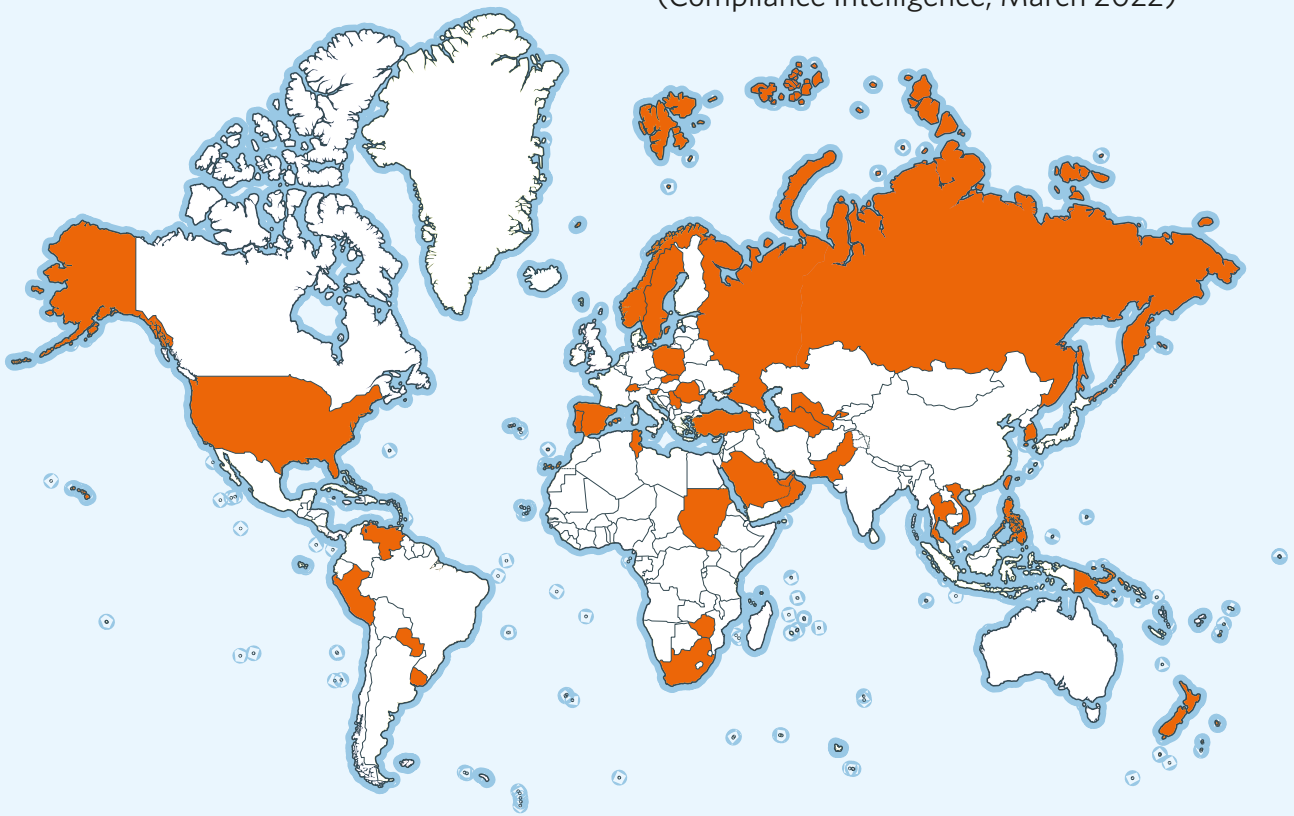
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Challenge #1: Requirements for OHS competent persons are increasingly complex.

Did you know that more than 90 countries around the world require employers to hire a competent person responsible for occupational health and safety (OHS) at the workplace? And that's not even counting the provincial or local requirements that are supplemental (or in some cases, more stringent) to national regulations.

This map shows just some of the jurisdictions where workplaces are required to appoint, hire, or elect some form of health and safety specialist at the national level. It's likely that more countries will follow. And as overall OHS regulations evolve, so do the related requirements for having a competent person onsite.

Tracked countries where H&S competent persons are required.
(Compliance Intelligence, March 2022)



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Requirements for a competent person fluctuate with business size and activity.

Currently, there's no universal requirement for a health and safety competent person, instead it most often comes down to how many employees you have and what you do. Of course, generally speaking, regulations most often task this role with inspecting the workplace for unsafe conditions, advising employers and employees on methods to make the workplace or processes safe, and investigating workplace injuries and accidents. But to be fully aligned with your jurisdictions' requirements for the role, you need to size up your facilities - literally.



For instance, all employers in Cyprus must have a safety representative to identify and make recommendations regarding health and safety measures at the workplace. However, larger workplaces (200 employees or more) in the country must retain a full-time safety officer charged with workplace risk assessments, inspections, and various other specified duties.

Additionally, in some countries, the larger your workforce, the more OHS specialists you need. These regulators specify a ratio of competent persons to regular employees or requiring additional persons to be hired under certain circumstances. As one example, South Africa requires at least 1 health and safety representative for every 50 workers.

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What to know about your business scenario.

The most common way that regulations determine competent-person requirements is by establishing a minimum employee threshold. But it's not the only way. You'll also need to understand where your business falls according to different scenarios.

Here's a breakdown of how regulators make the distinction:

Minimum employee threshold.
Typically, the number of employees must reach between 50 and 100 employees before a competent person is required, but this minimum threshold can range anywhere from 2 to 2,000 employees.

All workplaces.
In the jurisdictions where this is required, such as Italy, all employers must appoint a competent person - regardless of the size of the facility or the types of activities in which they engage.

Combination of the 3

Hazardous activities.
These employers are required to comply regardless of their size, but only if they engage in listed hazardous activities or types of hazardous activities.

Some combination of the 3.
For example, Indonesia requires facilities with 100 workers to appoint an occupational health and safety expert. However, a facility with less than 100 workers that engages in a high hazard potential activity is also required to appoint such an expert.

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Still other factors influence your obligations.

Some countries include further specifications for who is required to appoint a competent person, when they need to do it, and how. These include:

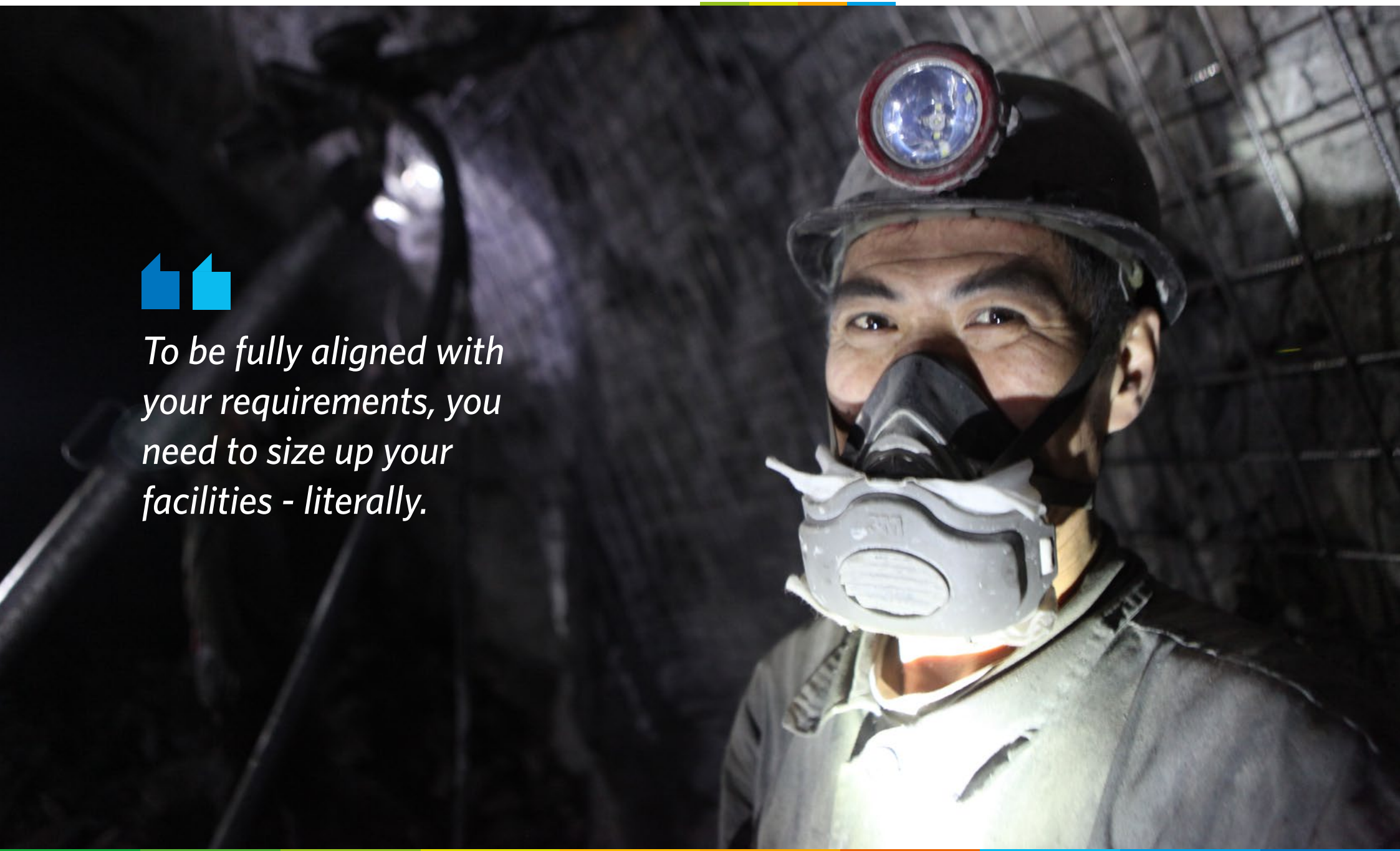
Appointment decision: In certain cases, employers aren't allowed to appoint the health and safety competent person themselves. Instead, they must allow the workers to elect a qualified person from among their team. This is the case in New Zealand, where companies must facilitate the election of health and safety representatives from the various work groups in their facilities.

"Health services" requirements: Rather than appointing an employee to be an OHS person, many jurisdictions require participation in an occupational health and safety service or other health service, which performs the duties typical of a competent person, but can be retained by multiple employers.

How to overcome it.

The answer might sound simpler than it is: Have a complete and clear picture of your business's obligations as they evolve. While this whitepaper gives you a good glimpse of what's required where, it's not the full picture. With constantly evolving regulations for health and safety competent persons – how could it be? Maintaining a regularly updated, centralized outlook of what's changing around the world keeps your EHS program ahead of the next evolution. Our Regulatory Forecaster does just that, with a forward-looking view of what could be changing in your operating regions.

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To be fully aligned with your requirements, you need to size up your facilities - literally.

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Challenge #2:

Health and safety worries in remote working.

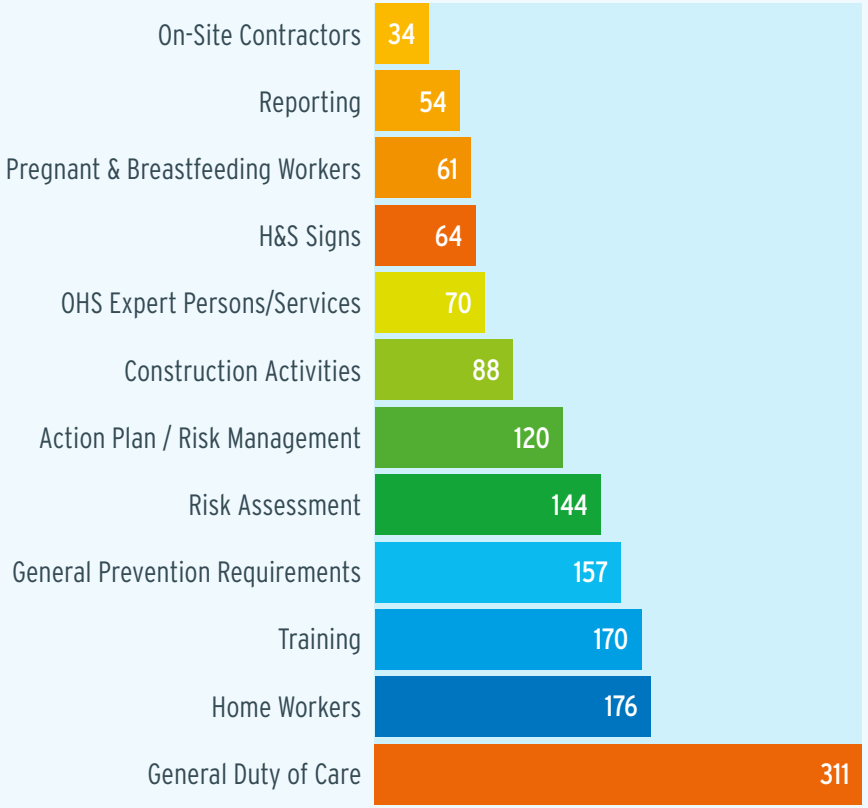
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Challenge #2: Health and safety worries in remote working.

Regulators are now determining which risks associated with remote work officially need to be included in an organization's risk assessments. Before 2020, remote work wasn't prominent in our working world. And, understandably, protecting workers from occupational injuries that occurred at their homes wasn't at the top of our list of concerns. Fast forward to how working from home became more common – and therefore, related regulatory changes became more frequent. In 2021 alone, our Regulatory Forecaster service tracked 176 regulatory developments related to home working – the second-highest sub-category in Safety Management.

With more and more businesses embracing the flexibility and often decreased costs of remote work, your risk management must now extend to your workers' private homes.

Chart 1: Regulatory developments in safety management (2021)



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How to overcome it.

Official guidelines aren't in place for teleworking risk management in every jurisdiction. To know where to start, it's a best practice to assume that risks usually occurring onsite could also impose hazards offsite. For instance, electrical safety and machine safety (e.g., if the workers need to use specialized machinery/equipment at home office) as well as ergonomic issues for workers (e.g., especially for those using visual screen equipment.)

But you can do even more to protect employees wherever they work.

Keep watch of what's happening in homeworking around the world.

Today, quite a few countries have passed legislation to more specifically guide employers to identify occupational health and safety risks for remote workers. For instance, in January 2022, Columbian regulators proposed that employers be required to include remote work in their risk assessments and conduct virtual inspection of the hygiene and safety conditions of remote workers' remote workplaces.

So companies may anticipate some form of virtual risk assessment for remote workers, and further guidance or standards are expected to be made by the governing agencies in the near future. Even more specific is the decision of the German court, who decided that an injury that occurred between a worker's bed and desk in the home office, was a safety accident occurred during a service route and thus it should be covered by its statutory accident insurance.

Even if your country or local agencies haven't directly spoken on this issue, you can follow these examples as reference in enhancing your risk assessment to more comprehensively mitigate the health and safety hazards.

Be aware of potential obligations before they're in place.

Essentially, no matter where you operate, to accurately account for health and safety risks, you'll need to broaden the scope of the risk assessment to include protecting workers at home. Today that means not only staying aligned with current regulations but also staying ahead of requirements to come. The Enhesa Regulatory Forecaster looks beyond legislation, including proposals and policies in its AI-powered index of what to watch. And that puts you a step ahead in preparing your business for potential impact.

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To accurately account for health and safety risks, risk assessments must include protecting workers at home.

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Challenge #3:

Safeguarding against stress and other threats to mental health.

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Challenge #3: Safeguarding against stress and other threats to mental health.



In general, stressful and unhealthy work environments present (often hidden) risks. Beyond damaging workers' overall well-being, these are also major contributing factors to workplace incidents, costing employers' retention of experienced and talented workers. Due to increased sick leave, burnout complaints, and high turnover during the stressful pandemic period, a brighter light is shining on workers' mental well-being. As a result, we expect to see additional mental health legislation mandated through health and safety regulations. However, businesses will need to work harder to see what risks lie within their facilities.

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How to overcome it.

To uncover what factors might be threatening your employees' well-being, we recommend taking a closer look at potential workers' mental health issues and place it as one of your top priorities for risk management.

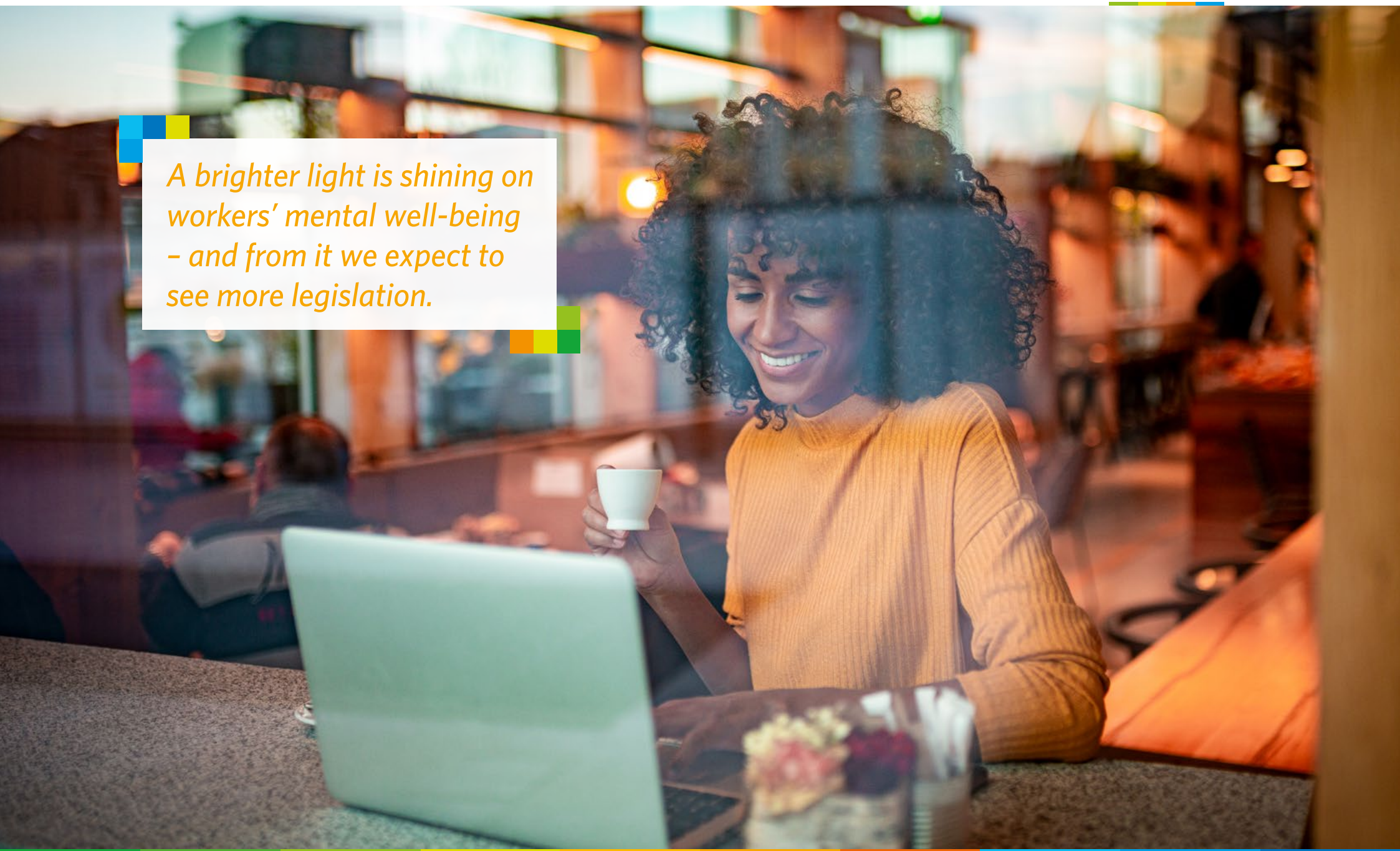
For example, review your occupational health and safety manual to identify any potential risks for workplace burnouts, including any implied pressure to work long hours or missing information about mental health risks and employee support options. Make sure to also factor in the frequency and duration of exposure to certain risks. For instance, tracking higher injury rates connected with specific tasks which may be building stress over time. These could include overload of work for an extensive period of time, environments with poor ergonomics, and isolation at work.

But - be careful not to attempt addressing these risks in a silo. Work together with other departments to tackle issues in your organization. Your EHS compliance team should collaborate with human resources to monitor any unusual patterns of sick leave, turnover/burnout rates, and increase in safety incidents.

Be prepared before issues become obligations.

For us all, the COVID-19 pandemic confirmed just how crucial comprehensive risk assessment is in terms of building better resilience for business – come what may. And if we've learned anything, it's that keeping workers and the community safe means staying ahead of changing regulations. The Enhesa Regulatory Forecaster enables you to anticipate risk ahead of time. Its extensive coverage of proposals, policies, and jurisprudence gives a longer-term view of what impact is coming down the pipeline for your business.

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A brighter light is shining on workers' mental well-being – and from it we expect to see more legislation.

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Challenge #4:

Training must accommodate virtual - and diverse - needs.

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Challenge #4: Training must accommodate virtual - and diverse - needs.

Training is one of the most crucial and challenging parts of a company's health and safety program. Not only in the sense of communicating information but also in staying compliant with changing regulations. In fact, from Jan 2021 to Mar 2022, our Regulatory Forecaster service tracked 221 global regulatory developments related to training. And it's only getting more complicated.



As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, workforces are increasingly remote or a hybrid of in-person and homeworking. Because companies still must administer all the required training regardless of whether workers are onsite, many have turned to online training as a solution. But virtual learning isn't effective for everyone.

Many companies have seen a clear difference in the effectiveness of this way of training across various worker groups. Some workers get more out of in-person, day-long training sessions than they do from a virtual setting, while others prefer virtual or short, succinct sessions. Sometimes it relates to age and experience – but not always.

From generational differences to virtual vs. in-person learning preferences, companies face the challenge of adapting the way they train employees to our modern world while not losing participation in the process. So how do you ensure adequate training for such a wide range of needs and attention spans? One solution lies in social learning.

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How to overcome it.

One way to address multiple learning styles at once is through social learning. Thanks to its accessibility, social learning offers an opportunity to create a culture devoted to safety and help employees engage in training and retain information. Social learning can create a collaborative learning environment, which helps employees teach and learn from each other.

You can leverage this type of training in many different ways. Some companies use internal platforms, like a ticketing system or messaging applications, to encourage employees to ask questions and raise concerns. Others hold microlearning sessions for group discussions that focus on a particular safety issue in a short amount of time. This idea is to infuse training into your workforce in small, easy-to-consume doses and to keep the conversation ongoing.

Smaller time investment, bigger impact.

Well-known in the construction sector as "toolbox talks," forms of microlearning have also made their way to other business types, even office settings. These mini training sessions serve as an effective compromise between lengthy in-person sessions and hard-to-follow virtual training. While some workers may not remain engaged during a 30-minutes (or longer) training lecture, they're more likely to stay actively present in short 5–15-minutes videos that directly communicate the main points.

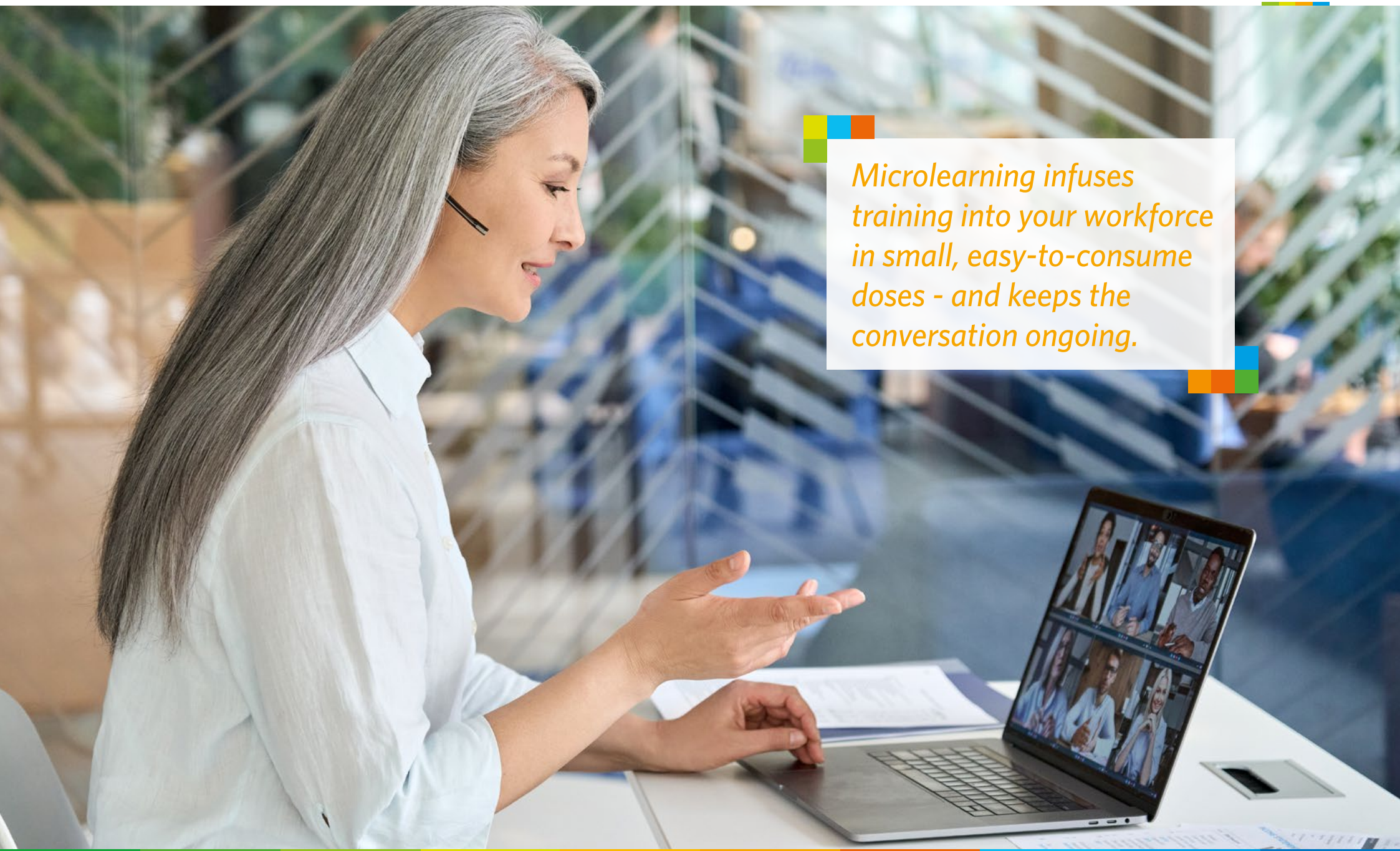
The short format also allows for the use of real-work examples. For instance, one training session could be a short, internally recorded video of how to lock out a specific piece of equipment. As such, these shorter bursts of training are often more relevant for the employees receiving the training, who often more easily retain the information.

Go even further with a more effective program.

Employers will always be held responsible for administering adequate workplace training. But the parameters behind what makes that training "work" for your workforce will continue to change. The most successful training programs will continually evolve to not only meet regulatory requirements but also to provide training that is effective and impactful for their workforce.

Overall, you must provide training that will be effective for every employee, no matter their age, background, or learning style. All while following your jurisdictions' regulations. For a more comprehensive view of your company's training requirements, our Regulatory Forecaster offers a forward-looking view into how changes to these (and more) regulations could impact your company in the future.

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Microlearning infuses training into your workforce in small, easy-to-consume doses - and keeps the conversation ongoing.

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Conclusion.

Occupational health and safety has come a long way over the years. Not only are the ways we work continuously evolving and new risks emerging, our awareness and understanding of even familiar hazards grow day by day. By staying aware of current trends and compliance requirements, you set yourself, your organization, and your employees up for a safe and healthy workplace. The 4 challenges in this resource are only a small portion of how health and safety in the workplace is changing. To truly keep pace with how this area is progressing, you'll need to keep up on how regulations change around the globe, on an ongoing basis.

Access to regulatory content and support services for your health and safety programs will maximize results and move your EHS program forward. Enhesa offers specialized guidance on assessment, roll-out, and ongoing management for health and safety in the workplace. Helping your team skip the guesswork so you can focus on the real work of protecting your employees and our collective community.

Want to get ahead of these and other upcoming challenges?

Watch our Regulatory Forecaster in action and see how to track rising trends for your business!

Access the free online demo.

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The Enhesa difference

Enhesa is the leading provider of regulatory content and sustainability intelligence worldwide. As a trusted partner we empower the global business community with the insight to step up and step forward to create a more sustainable working world – positively impacting our environment, our health, our safety and our future.

Our services offer the industry's most trusted regulatory intelligence outlook, covering the 11 essential EHS compliance topics - including occupational health, air emissions, emergency preparedness, technical safety, and much more - across the largest number of regions: over 300 jurisdictions across the globe. Our global team of 75+ legal analysts track and translate evolving regulations into actionable requirements tailored to your business and its needs. Enabling you to explore the expanding EHS labyrinth, act to achieve compliance now, and plan for impact in the future.

We want to help you build a better world, with EHS compliance services and support built for your business.

Connect with our team to find out more.

Regulatory Forecaster: Your crystal ball for EHS compliance.

See into the future of EHS regulations and keep your company on top of the ever-changing regulatory agenda. Knowing what is coming and what you need to do to be prepared is key when it comes to new EHS regulatory developments. Our extensive EHS Regulatory Forecaster service guides you through the worldwide regulatory maze and helps you stay on top of what matters most to your business – anywhere, anytime.



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A regulatory compliance solution helps your business fully see your compliance requirements and succeed in fulfilling them.

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