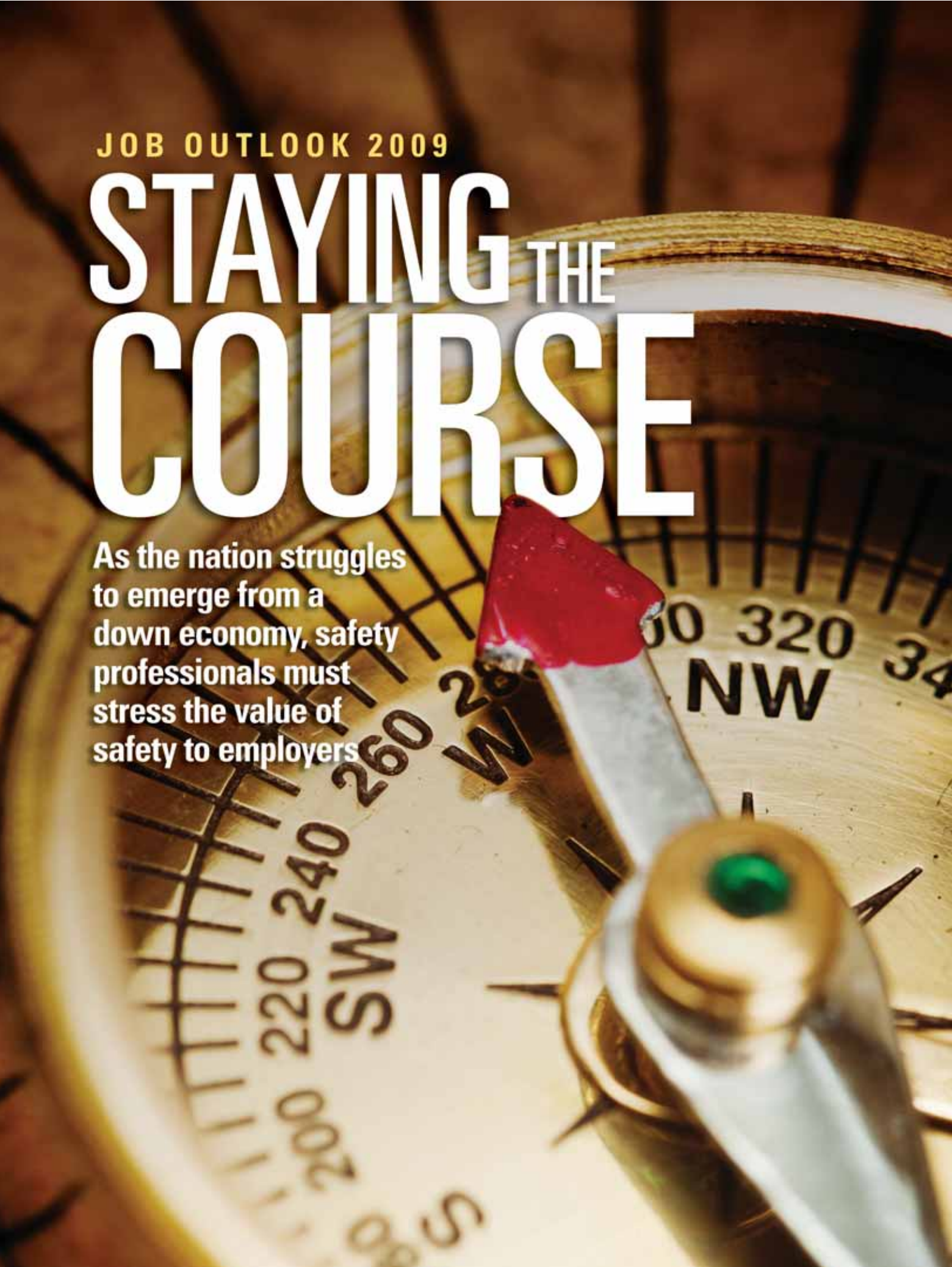


JOB OUTLOOK 2009

STAYING THE COURSE

As the nation struggles to emerge from a down economy, safety professionals must stress the value of safety to employers



By Deidre Bello, associate editor

In the midst of the current economic recession, many organizations have found themselves in “survival mode.” Safety and health professionals are questioning how budget constraints will affect their positions and their organizations’ ability to maintain strong safety, health and environmental initiatives in addition to tackling security, human resources and environmental responsibilities.

A number of respondents to a *Safety+Health* magazine online survey conducted in February conveyed pessimistic outlooks amid budget constraints and emerging challenges. Still, others seemed cautiously optimistic that the U.S. economy will rebound within the year, and that the SH&E profession will continue to be valuable to an organization’s success. Of the more than 2,700 respondents, 52.5 percent said the role of the SH&E professional will expand in the next five years, 36.1 percent said it will stay the same, and 11.1 percent said it will decrease.

Safety pros can help ensure steady job growth by stressing their role in an organization’s overall success, National Safety Council consultant John Czerniak said.

jobs “relatively stable” and 5.7 percent who believed there was a “slight possibility” they would lose their jobs.

John Czerniak, senior consultant for the National Safety Council, and others in the SH&E field say the road map for the profession’s future requires SH&E professionals to ensure steady occupational growth by stressing their role in an organization’s overall success. The most effective safety professionals understand the bottom line for an organization, as well as the value of their own work, Czerniak said.

The more optimistic views are in line with 2008 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, which showed the profession would continue to thrive despite the added responsibilities of a down economy. Forty-nine percent of respondents to the *Safety+Health* 2008 Salary Survey said they consider their jobs “very stable,” compared with 40.8 percent who considered their

Educating about safety value, the bottom line

Labor economists have predicted steady job growth for the SH&E professional because of an increased need over the past two decades to combat rising insurance and workers’ compensation costs. However, it is hard to ignore the rippling effects the economic recession of 2008 has had on Americans. In February, the unemployment rate rose to 8.1 percent, and the number of unemployed workers increased by 851,000 to 12.5 million, according to BLS. Job losses were widespread across nearly all major industry sectors, Department of Labor data shows.

According to the most recent BLS data, as of May 2007, 46,460 people (with a mean annual wage of \$61,310) were employed as occupational safety and health specialists and 10,260 (with a mean annual wage of \$46,200) were employed as occupational safety and health technicians. In 2006, an estimated 56,000 people were employed in the SH&E occupation.

More than half of the respondents to the *Safety+Health* surveys said they would keep staffing and

Feature at a Glance

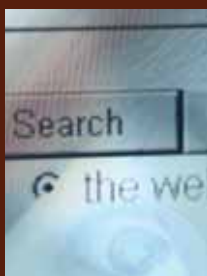
In the midst of the current economic recession, experts say safety, health and environmental professionals must stress their role in an organization’s overall success to ensure steady occupational growth.

Key points

- Increased societal expectations for safer products, a safer workplace and a safer environment could be reflected in changing and stricter regulations.
- Aging and retirement of baby boomers will add pressure to fill generational gaps that threaten SH&E intellectual capital.
- The next generation of SH&E professionals will face the challenge of ensuring they have diversified knowledge.
- As SH&E professionals take on these evolving responsibilities and challenges, it is vital they remember and continue to be inspired by the true lifesaving value of their work.

GENERATIONAL GAPS EVIDENT IN INTERNET USE

Researchers with the Bureau of Labor Statistics and safety and health experts have long predicted the use of technology and the Internet would quickly increase in the field in the coming decade. But while the number of technophile baby boomers seems to be growing each year in terms of cell phone and Internet use, the generational gap of technology and Internet enthusiasts still appears wide in the SH&E workplace.



According to *Safety+Health's* 2008 Salary Survey, nearly 60 percent of respondents said they do not participate in interactive online work-related activities, 46.5 percent of respondents did not participate in a work-related Webinar in the first six months of 2008, and 80.7 percent have not listened to any work-related podcasts. About 60 percent did not know what an RSS feed was (an Internet function that aggregates news stories by topics).

SURVEY SAYS ...

According to *Safety+Health* magazine's 2008 Salary Survey of safety professionals:

- 40.1 percent** of respondents were 51-60 years old, while 30.4 percent were in the 41-50 age range.
- 28.8 percent** of respondents participated in a work-related forum, message board or e-mail discussion list.
- 19.2 percent** of respondents have heard of RSS feeds, but were not interested in using them.
- 77.5 percent** do not use a PDA or smart phone to access the Internet for work-related tasks.



budget levels the same as they monitor the effects of the down economy.

Czerniak advises doing two things to maintain the value of the SH&E role: Educate others on the benefits of the SH&E function, and understand the bottom line for your organization and the value of your work.

"It is important that a safety professional always – recession or not – be talking in terms of how their safety efforts benefit the person who is listening," Czerniak said. "Specifically, when speaking with the management group, safety professionals should explain that as injuries decrease, expenses decrease and profits go up."

Healthy, experienced employees tend to be more productive, which also increases profit. As profits increase, job security for all employees also increases. SH&E professionals should align themselves with the message that an added benefit of supporting their work is a reduction in potential OSHA fines and legal claims. The well-supported efforts of a safety professional help protect a company's public image, Czerniak said.

For professionals who work for organizations that understand the value of the SH&E field, there is light at the end of the tunnel, Czerniak and other experts say.

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John Czerniak,
National Safety Council

Broad knowledge, technical skills in demand

BLS reported in the 2008-2009 edition of its "Occupational Outlook Handbook" that average employment growth is expected for SH&E engineers, and additional opportunities will arise as workers retire. Employment of occupational SH&E specialists and technicians is expected to increase 9 percent during the next decade.

This demand is the effect of a convergence of multiple factors, said Ashutosh Riswadkar, director of the liability line of business at Zurich Services Corp., a global insurance-based financial services provider in Switzerland. Those factors include the increased expectations of society for safer products, a safer workplace and a safer environment.

Meanwhile, aging and retirement within the baby boomer ranks of experienced SH&E professionals is

threatening intellectual capital, Riswadkar said. Other factors include:

- Increased complexities of products, systems and technologies that require high levels of technical competencies for managing the risks, gaps in science, engineering and technology education
- Gaps in science, engineering and technology education, which create a significant vulnerability that can lead to a serious shortage of SH&E professionals in many industries

“Many companies are recognizing these trends,” Riswadkar said. “They are taking measures to protect their intellectual capital of experienced SH&E professionals and initiating training and mentoring programs to address the anticipated gaps.”

New and existing generations of SH&E professionals will have to assess and manage increasingly complex risks throughout the entire life cycle of complex new products, systems and technologies, Riswadkar said.

“They will have to assess and be cognizant of 360 degrees of risk to the consumers, workers and the environment,” he said. In addition to technical skills and abilities, they also will need risk communication skills as well as the ability to address SH&E priorities that deliver cost-effective solutions and alternatives in a budget-constrained down economy, he said.

The next SH&E generation

Many universities already offer courses intended to ensure the next generation of SH&E graduates have a broad range of knowledge, from industrial hygiene and manufacturing to construction safety and emergency response. Baltimore-based ABET Inc. – an accreditor for college and university programs in applied science, computing, engineering and technology – broke a record for the number of evaluations it conducted during the 2008-2009 accreditation cycle: 895 programs, 675 general or interim visits, and 220 interim reports. The sharpest increase was in engineering programs evaluated and non-domestic programs visited. In 2007, 43 programs in industrial hygiene were accredited while 13 were accredited for safety. ABET has accredited an average of 2,850 programs over the past five years.

Students involved in safety sciences at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania, in Indiana, PA, study fire safety,

SURVEY SAYS ...

According to *Safety+Health* magazine's recent surveys of safety professionals:



✓ **49.9 percent** of safety professionals who responded to an informal online survey described their jobs as “very stable” and 40.8 percent considered their jobs “relatively stable.”

✓ **52.5 percent** of respondents expected the role of the SH&E professional to expand in the next five years.

✓ **50.7 percent** of respondents maintained about the same budget in 2008 as they had in 2007, while 39 percent increased their budgets in 2008.

✓ **25.6 percent** of respondents worked for an organization that outsourced part of its facility safety program.

ergonomics, industrial hygiene, safety management and construction safety. This allows them to have a generalist knowledge that will be of tremendous value, said Lon Ferguson, professor and chairman of the Department of Safety Sciences at IUP, where faculty are optimistic they will have a 94 percent placement rate for May graduates.

Meanwhile, Steven Thygerson, assistant professor in the Department of Health Science at Brigham Young University in Provo, UT, said students are taking courses in the environmental health track. Whether restrictions become tighter, stay the same or are lessened, there will always be a need for environmental technicians and environmental engineers – and those who can simply manage environmental programs, Thygerson said.

Ferguson said the roadblock SH&E students will face in the next year is finding and competing for internship opportunities to gain hands-on experience. “When we have an economic downturn, grades are going to become more important, and clearly one of the things that will separate students is showing that they have real-world experience in the field,” he said, adding that it might be difficult for organizations to justify bringing in an intern when full-time workers are being laid off.

Labor economists also believe job growth should remain stable for those specializing in loss prevention, especially in construction safety and ergonomics. Under the Obama administration, and as the economy rebounds, the construction industry will likely see a need for SH&E professionals, Thygerson said.

Professor William Watt of Wayne State University in Detroit said efforts are also apparent at his university, where faculty members go beyond teachings in manufacturing and chemical SH&E. In the fall, the university added a class on construction safety – an area Watt said is currently underserved but likely will attract more interest as more attention is placed on construction safety at the national level. The university also added an emergency response course and, next winter, will add a class on institutional safety.

“Health and safety is a great and noble profession; the value of it is still well-known,” Watt said. “Maybe – especially with new national administration – the value of it is going to increasingly be recognized, and I think it’s still a good field to be getting into.”

Maintaining an edge

SH&E professionals already in the field must accurately position themselves to maintain a competitive edge as organizations become increasingly selective and older workers choose to continue working past retirement age. In addition, they have the responsibility of passing on intellectual knowledge to the younger generation of SH&E workers.

As the new breed of safety professionals comes into the field, the pressure to become certified has grown even

greater for SH&E professionals to retain and be effective in their positions. Roger Brauer, executive director for the Board of Certified Safety Professionals in Savoy, IL, said studies by BCSP show that over the past few years, about 50 percent of jobs include certification as a selection factor, he said.

“Historically, when the economy is down, interest in certification tends to go up because people are positioning to be able to compete more rigorously for a position,” Brauer said.

In addition, pay differential for a CSP is between \$20,000 and \$30,000, compared to an SH&E worker with no certification, he said.

Labor economists foresee more workers taking on consulting positions. *Safety+Health* magazine’s survey, however, shows this option has yet to gain popularity among some organizations. Only 25.6 percent of the 2,738 respondents to a survey question on outsourcing said their facility currently outsources a portion of its safety program.

Watt said although he foresees a shift toward more use of consultants, those consultants likely will be based in the United States.

Remembering what matters

Czerniak said that as SH&E professionals take on these new challenges, it is vital that they remember the value of their work. During the years he worked for a chemical corporation, Czerniak said his safety management efforts likely helped prevent between three and seven people from dying on the job.

“What keeps me going is I understand in everything I do that my work matters. The most effective safety people have probably saved at least one or more workers over the course of their career. That means because of the safety person’s efforts, some kid gets to have his mother or father a little bit longer,” Czerniak said. “At a time like this, understand in your heart that what you’re doing matters. If you don’t understand that, it’s going to get really hard.”

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Roger Brauer, Board of Certified Safety Professionals

STATES WITH THE HIGHEST PUBLISHED EMPLOYMENT CONCENTRATIONS AND WAGES FOR SAFETY AND HEALTH ENGINEERS*

1. SOUTH CAROLINA (Employed 740; mean annual wage \$71,150)
2. LOUISIANA (Employed 540; mean annual wage \$64,370)
3. OKLAHOMA (Employed 390; mean annual wage \$53,170)
4. WEST VIRGINIA (Employed 310; mean annual wage \$57,410)
5. ALASKA (Employed 90; mean annual wage \$80,870)

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, data for 2006 (As of May 2007)
*Data does not include mining safety engineers and inspectors

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