

Must-Know Tips to Build a Business Case for EHS Software

Most organizations would like to be among the safest places to work. Yet, every workplace is subject to occupational hazards and risks. The key is to mitigate incidents wherever possible while documenting and investigating occurrences to ensure constant improvement. Environmental, health, and safety (EHS), and software addresses these requirements and much more. Delve into this FAQ to uncover the business value of EHS software, and how to convince senior leadership to invest in these solutions.

Why should my business consider a commercial EHS software solution?

Excel spreadsheets and internally built systems have limitations related to compliance and maintenance costs associated with current technology. For example, a homegrown solution may not be automated to check for the latest industry or government regulations or have the ability to send automated alerts or reminders. These deficiencies may put you at a disadvantage when reporting requirements or similar policies change. Sometimes, the developers who created the homegrown system leave the company, and you lose that expertise. Also, it takes time to support a solution built in-house. Most IT teams are already overwhelmed and can't sufficiently supply support, causing the system to cost more over time than investing in commercial EHS software. Relying on internally built systems places your company in a reactive position rather than taking a proactive approach to avoid risks. Commercial EHS solutions typically incorporate analytics that help safety professionals gain visibility into trends and potential hazards to develop a more robust safety program and internal safety culture.

When will we know we're ready for an EHS software solution?

There are a few indicators. One is the lack of IT support to maintain and update your existing system, which then typically causes more work for EHS professionals. Furthermore, if your organization meets basic compliance yet faces challenges in preventing incidents from recurring, it's clear that adopting an EHS software solution could be a helpful next move. You may also find your organization is ready to invest in a solution if your company has a new EHS or operations leader. This is an opportunity to become more proactive and start tracking EHS leading indicators. Grab the attention of leadership and gain their commitment to improving worker safety and the overall safety culture (see the next tip!).

Who should be involved in the decision-making process?

First, you need a champion — someone to lead the process, discussions, and overall project. That person might be you, a senior member of the EHS team, or an operations leader. Then, the effort should start by understanding your executive team's priorities and making the connection to EHS. For example, a commercial EHS solution can save time, mitigate risks, create a safer environment, and help meet sustainability goals. Talk with department heads to understand the metrics they track, how they use systems to communicate and report, and how they involve executives in the decision-making process. Include IT in discussions. Ask how they select and test new software so you'll know the questions to ask vendors. Obtain an understanding about budget, vendor selection, and ROI expectations from the finance team.

What capabilities should be considered when choosing an EHS software solution?

Mobility is a big one. Seek a platform that has been specifically developed to work on smartphones and tablets — not just a URL users open on their mobile devices. Similarly, make sure the solution can work offline, especially if you have facilities or areas within sites that don't have Wi-Fi. This feature is critical to improve data accuracy, completeness, and timeliness, ensuring your organization can anticipate and prevent future incidents. Consider whether the software can integrate with your other solutions. Sending and receiving data from different systems not only reduces the risk of manual entry errors, but also enriches the information and insights that can be gleaned across the organization.

Where should we start? Are there safety components that should be automated first?

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Think about areas where you can make quick wins that meet business objectives. Many organizations prioritize incident management, audit and inspection management, and/or compliance calendar functionality for their initial launch. Any of these areas are good places to start. For example, if compliance is an executive priority, you could launch an EHS software module that automates calendars, sending reminders when permits are due or when inspections will occur.

Remember to tie your EHS journey to business value — in other words, what the C-suite cares about. If your company has had a violation for incorrect disposal of materials, for example, it's likely executives will look closely for any fines incurred. Automated reminders can help alleviate running into those situations. Another area is training materials, such as equipment manuals or processes. If that's automated, you'll be able to rapidly demonstrate to inspectors or auditors the availability of that information.

What are the potential pitfalls that may delay or hijack the process, and how can we avoid them?

One pitfall is describing the solution's value in the same way to all audiences. For example, the C-suite may focus on reducing downtime and improving productivity, while local EHS and operations managers may be more motivated to send people home safely every day. Make sure to focus on the value proposition for each audience and include EHS metrics that matter to them. This avoids misread expectations while demonstrating success with evidence.

Another pitfall is granting too much or too little flexibility for each location or group. Many systems are highly configurable; however, it's important to work with a software provider that can offer a common framework. This helps you maintain a consistent set of practices and analytics across the business. Some systems are expensive or cumbersome to tailor to your environment. Employees are more likely to reject the system if it seems foreign compared to their current practices. Therefore, a level of configurability can help you drive adoption and get more data into the system for greater insights.

Finally, avoid miscommunication or a lack of dialogue, which can derail the project by sowing confusion. Create a timeline and start communications early. For example, start talking about the solution at employee activities such as wellness fairs or lunch-and-learn sessions. That way, by the time the solution is rolled out, it is expected rather than a surprise. You might consider using a change management methodology to help with the tasks associated with rolling out an EHS system to alleviate cultural resistance. These must-know tips collectively pave the way for a safer, more efficient, and innovative future.

Dive deeper into measuring the ROI of safety. Contact us today via email at Info@preparedemployees.com

