New Zealand Journal of Health and Safety Practice
He rangi ta matawhaiti
He rangi ta matawhanui

A person with narrow vision has a restricted horizon; a person with wide vision has plentiful opportunities

Technology and Trust: Bridging the Gap Between System Compliance and System Truth

Vol 3; edition 4; November 2026
Author: Craig Bleakley

Email: craig@ecoportal.co.nz

DOI: https://doi.org/10.26686/nzjhsp.v3i4.11819

Keywords: Safety technology; Safety culture; Trust; Worker reporting; Near-miss reporting; Compliance; Health and safety management; Organisational trust

We've never had better safety tools. So why are organisations still blindsided by incidents they should have seen coming?

Usually, it comes down to trust. Whether people speak up determines if your safety system tells you the truth, or just reflects what they think you want to hear.

Where trust breaks down

1. The compliance trap. A system can look perfectly healthy right up until the moment it fails. Rising completion rates alongside flat near-miss reports is often the first sign of compliance, not engagement.

2. Trust as a system design problem. Technology doesn't create trust, but trust determines whether the data it collects is worth trusting. Blame-coded fields and slow follow-up quietly train people to underreport.

3. High vs low trust environments. The same software can produce different results depending on the environment. Low-trust systems see reports spike before audits, or issues raised verbally but never logged. High-trust systems see steady reporting that includes uncertainty and partial information.

4. Real-world examples. Organisations that close this gap don't retrain people. They redesign the system around them: removing punitive fields, speeding up feedback loops, and simplifying what honest reporting requires.

Where to start

1. Watch the gap

Track completion rates against actual near-miss and hazard reports. A widening gap over time is often the earliest warning sign, well before an incident happens.

2. Audit your fields

Check reporting fields and follow-up steps for anything that makes honesty harder, like blame-coded language or slow response times.

3. Close the loop

Show people what happens after they report. Silence is what teaches them to stop.