Workplace Safety and Preparedness

Annual Report of Full-Time Employees from Industries Across the U.S.

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Table of Contents

In a year of unprecedented change, employers needed to redefine the workplace while ensuring the safety of their employees both on-site and remotely.

The fourth annual Workplace Safety and Preparedness research survey was conducted in March 2021. Over 515 surveys were completed by full-time employees in various industries across the United States.

Findings show that employers are rethinking how to protect employees in the face of the COVID-19 outbreak. This required more effort than simply preventing illness exposure. It also meant establishing flexible modes of communication with a workforce that could be in the workplace, working off-site or remotely, or in a combination of these environments.

Employee communication methods must be able to reach workers wherever they are, and this year's survey showed that many of these methods need to be revisited. This also means that employees must be able to access important information regardless of their location, in addition to having the ability to speak up about any safety needs or concerns.

Survey respondents who worked in manufacturing and healthcare, as well as at small or medium-sized businesses (SMB), reported some unique approaches to these challenges. Although these three groups vary greatly when it comes to emergency preparedness and critical communication, their strategies help illustrate what the landscape of workplace safety and employee communication will look like as the impact of the coronavirus outbreak continues to drive continued evolution in all industries.

Survey Respondents

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES

	2021		2020
1–205	**38%**	0–100	30%
250–1,000	**20%**	100–500	20%
1,000–2,500	**11%**	500–1,000	12%
2,500–5,000	**8%**	1,000–5,000	14%
5,000-10,000	**6%**	5,000+	24%
10,000+	**17%**	10,000+	Option not included in 2020 survey

AGE OF EMPLOYEES

	2021	2020
18–29	**19%**	14%
30–44	**29%**	32%
45–60	**44%**	45%
60+	**8%**	9%

GENDER

	2021	2020
Female	**50%**	49%
Male	**50%**	51%

INDUSTRY*

	2021	2020
Healthcare	**17%**	17%
Education	**12%**	21%
Professional Services	**10%**	7%
Manufacturing	**10%**	9%
Retail	**10%**	10%

TIME IN OFFICE

	2021	2020
Every Day	**28%**	54%
75%-99% of the time	**25%**	18%
50%-74% of the time	**14%**	10%
25%-49% of the time	**7%**	7%
Less than 25% of the time	**8%**	7%
Never, 100% remote	**14%**	4%
Sporadically, only as needed	**4%**	Not asked in 2020

*Other industries representing less than 10% of the survey on their own include finance, government/municipal, transportation, media and communication, hospitality, non-profit/religious organization, energy/utilities, real estate, social services and public safety.

Key Findings

A remarkable rise in hybrid models of remote and off-site work

The coronavirus outbreak drove many people to work off-site in remote or home office set-ups. But survey results show that for many employees, this was not an all-or-nothing arrangement.

14% of respondents said they have been working completely remote over the last 12 months. That's compared to the 4% who said they were completely remote in last year's survey conducted prior to the COVID-19 outbreak.

The 2021 survey shows the majority of respondents were working both on-site and remotely. 50% of respondents said they were in a hybrid model that had them in the workplace sporadically to 99% of the time. Only 28% said they were in the workplace every day, a decrease from 54% prior to the pandemic.

Even when coronavirus precautions are no longer necessary, this structure could remain. For employers, this means that employee communication has yet another level of complexity. Whether they're in the workplace, remote, or somewhere in between, those responsible for employee safety must have the communication channels and strategies in place to reach these people wherever they are.

Methods of employee communication need to be revisited

Effective employee communication isn't just about where they're working. Companies need to take employee opinion into consideration so they can reach workers in the method that works best for them.

Survey results show that employer-preferred communication channels are not adapting to the evolving workplace landscape. In the event of an emergency, 56% of respondents said their employers would notify them via email. Meanwhile, 39% said they would be informed with an in-person announcement, and 36% said they would receive a notification through a mass text message.

These methods alone are not enough to reach today's transient workforce. Regardless of whether they are in the workplace or off-site, employees may not regard an email alert with the urgency needed to get their attention during an incident. Both email and text messages can easily be overlooked if an employee has notifications turned off to avoid distractions or interruptions while in a meeting or giving a presentation. In-person announcements are generally inefficient, as they don't account for workers who are off-site, in addition to being time consuming and potentially dangerous for the person making the announcement.

Furthermore, the use of these communication channels does not align with worker preferences. Polled employees who were frequently in the workplace listed mass text message (44%) as their top communication channel. This was also the most popular choice among respondents who primarily worked remotely or off-site, with 54% naming text messaging as their preference.

If employees can receive communication in the most accessible way for them, then it increases the likelihood they will pay attention to the message. Even if they're in a hybrid model of working remotely or in the workplace full time, employers need to engage these employees via the channels that are best for them. Failing to do this could mean that workers develop alert fatigue or regard messages as background noise instead of critical communication about their safety.

Traveling and remote workers could miss important safety information

According to the survey, employers may be neglecting traveling or off-site workers when it comes to sharing critical information that can impact their safety and wellbeing.

Only 28% of respondents said that remote or traveling workers were involved in safety drills. It can be a massive safety risk if these employees don't know appropriate plans or what actions to take in the event of an emergency. Even if they aren't physically in the workplace, they still need to be notified about these events, especially if it impacts their ability to reach coworkers who could be unavailable.

Survey results also revealed that people who spent less than half of their time in the workplace were less likely to know whether there were response plans for certain emergencies. For example, 29% of off-site workers said they didn't know if their employers had procedures for responding to an active shooter. But only 16% of respondents who spend the majority of their time in the workplace were unsure if there were specific steps for this type of incident.

This knowledge gap may be impacted further by workers' inability to access important safety information. 22% of employees who worked off-site most of the time said they lacked access to safety information (compared to 12% of respondents who worked on-site most of the time). If these employees can't instantly access information about appropriate actions to take, it could put their safety at an even greater risk.

"Only 28% of respondents said that remote or traveling workers were involved in safety drills. It can be a massive safety risk if these employees don't know appropriate plans or what actions to take in the event of an emergency."

The willingness to report safety concerns is not universal

When it comes to reporting safety concerns, the majority of survey respondents said they were willing to speak up. Overall, 66% of workers said they would report the issue even if they did not have the option to do so anonymously. 27% said they would only report if their identity could remain confidential.

When broken down by gender, however, survey results show that the willingness to report safety concerns was not the same across the board. Among survey respondents who identified as female, 72% said they would report concerns even if they weren't able to do so anonymously. However, only 60% of respondents who identified as male said they would report concerns even if they could not do so confidentially.

A culture of workplace safety cannot thrive if responsibility is unequally shared among employees. Employers need to make sure that workers understand the importance of speaking up about their own health and safety concerns or that of their fellow coworkers. If workers don't feel comfortable making their voice heard, then employers may not receive critical information about potential liabilities or safety oversights. By providing the opportunity to anonymously report concerns, employees can confidentially share their needs in a secure way. If everyone participates in this effort, then those responsible for safety are better positioned to gather the valuable insight they need to take immediate action.

Some employees are missing information about safety procedures

2020 was a year like no other, and respondents' experience with workplace safety reflected this. Coronavirus restrictions and an increase of a remote workforce meant that events like an active shooter incident or workplace violence were the least common emergencies. However, incidents such as a system outage or cyberattack could have an even greater impact on productivity, especially with so many employees working off-site and relying even more on channels of communication.

Majority of respondents **(52%) said they didn't have an emergency in the workplace in the last 12 months**. However, 22% reported their workplace experienced a medical emergency, and 21% experienced a severe weather event.

Despite this, **not every workplace practices safety procedures** for critical incidents like **workplace violence (43%)**, **system outage or cyberattack (43%)**, **active shooter (42%)** and **hazardous materials incidents (41%)**.

Respondents were **mostly likely to know plans** in the event of a **fire (83%)**, **medical emergency or exposure to illness (72%)** and **severe weather (70%)**.

71% said they always or **generally feel safe** while working. Yet **29% report feeling somewhat, rarely, or not safe** when working.

67% of people surveyed said they **felt their employer prioritized safety**. However, **33%** said **safety was somewhat, hardly or not at all important** in the workplace.

64% said their **employer prioritized their health and wellbeing**. But **36%** said **health and wellbeing was somewhat, hardly or not at all important** to their employer.

Are you aware of workplace emergency plans for any of these incidents?

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

ACTIVE SHOOTER

MEDICAL EMERGENCY

FIRE

HAZMAT INCIDENTS

WEATHER EVENTS

CYBERATTACKS/SYSTEM OUTAGES

33%

68%

■ YES
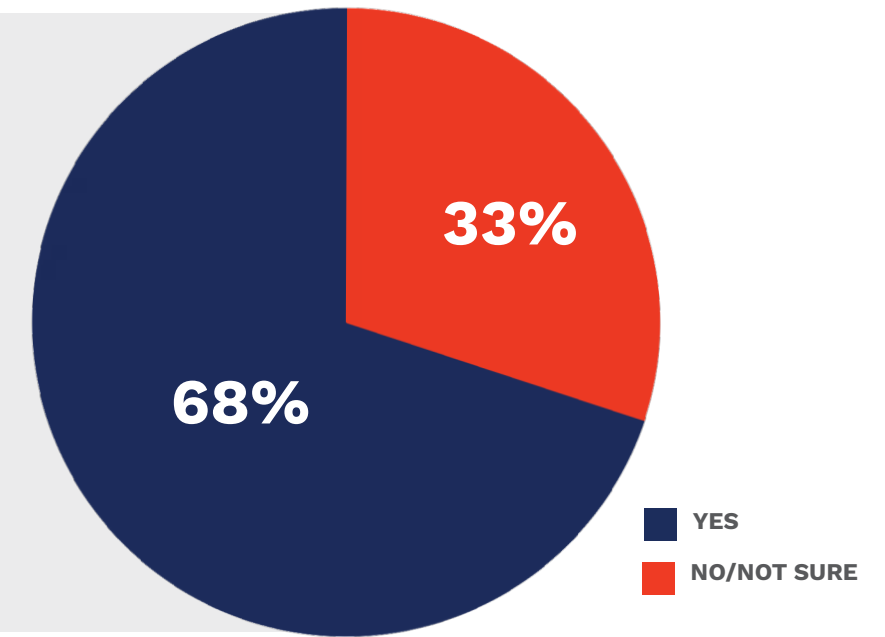
■ NO/NOT SURE

The most no/not sure responses were for these three incidents:

	2021	2020	% Change Year over Year
Active shooter	18%	20%	–10%
Cyberattacks/system outages	17%	20%	–15%
Workplace violence	16%	17%	–6%

Disparities exist between safety drills and the most common emergencies

The impact of the coronavirus outbreak defined 2020 and continues to remain top of mind in 2021. However, that doesn't mean that it was the only emergency employers needed to manage that year.

52% of respondents said they didn't experience a critical incident in the workplace in 2020. However, 22% said a medical emergency occurred their workplace, and 21% encountered severe weather events.

Despite the prevalence of these crises, respondents indicated that their workplaces were not regularly practicing for either event. 37% said that their employer never held safety drills for medical emergencies or exposure to illness, a major misstep in a year defined by concerns surrounding health and safety.

Additionally, 38% of respondents said they never drilled for severe weather events. With the increasing regularity of extreme weather catastrophes, it's a major safety concern if companies fail to plan and practice for these events.

Those in charge of safety must also establish a way to communicate with and inform employees who aren't in the workplace. For example, people who may be traveling to the workplace for their shift would need to be notified if severe weather is approaching, or if the facility is closing because of related hazards. Or employees who are working remotely may need to be informed of a crisis that impacts their coworkers' responsiveness. Employers may also have to utilize a backup channel of communication if high winds cause a power or system outage. In any of these cases, the workplace must establish procedures and make sure off-site staff are aware of these plans before an emergency actually occurs.

Awareness of Workplace Emergency Plans by Employee Age
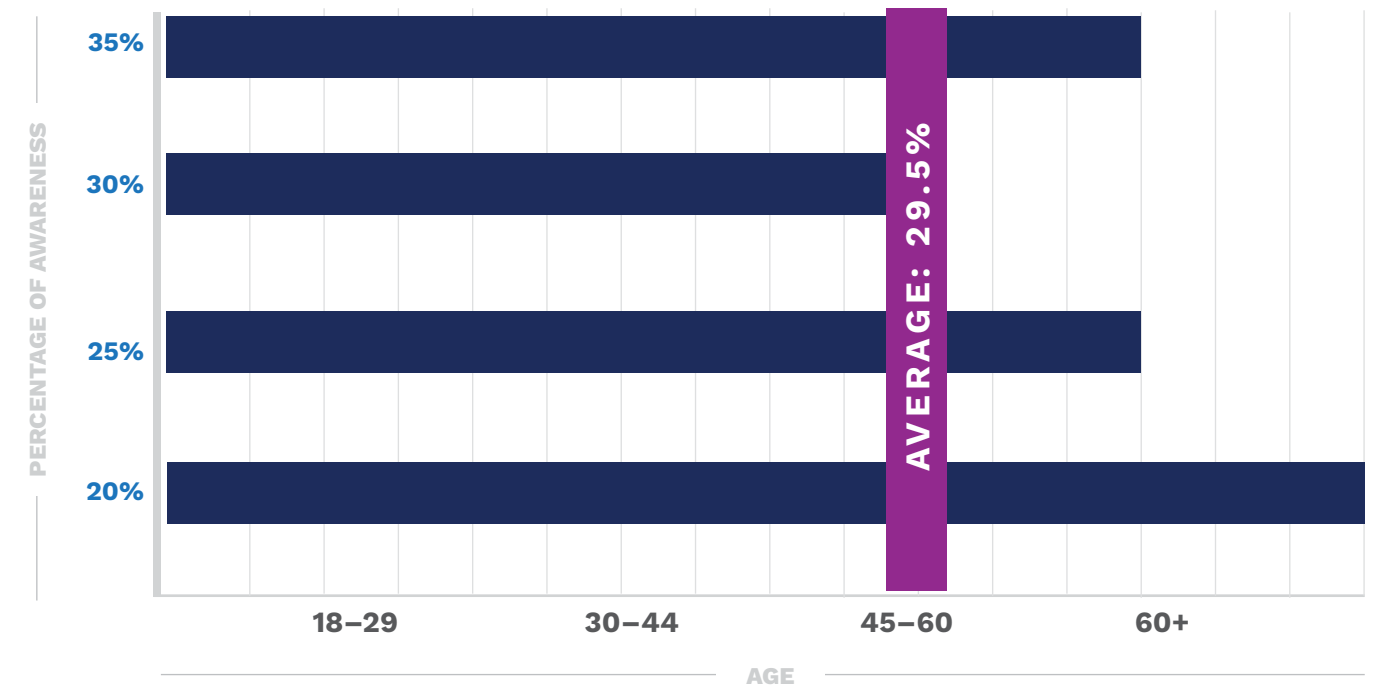
Industries where survey participants are currently employed

	#1 INDUSTRY	#2 INDUSTRY
18–29	Education	Healthcare
30–44	Healthcare	Software/Technology
45–60	Healthcare	Manufacturing
60+	Healthcare	Retail

Communication methods offered by employers vs. what employees want

For the second year in a row, survey results show that the most common modes of communication in workplaces were email and alerting employees in-person. Even prior to the coronavirus outbreak, these methods risked leaving workers uninformed.

In-person communication fails to account for employees who are working off-site and can be a safety risk both in terms of illness exposure and during certain situations, such as a building lockdown due to reports of an armed intruder.
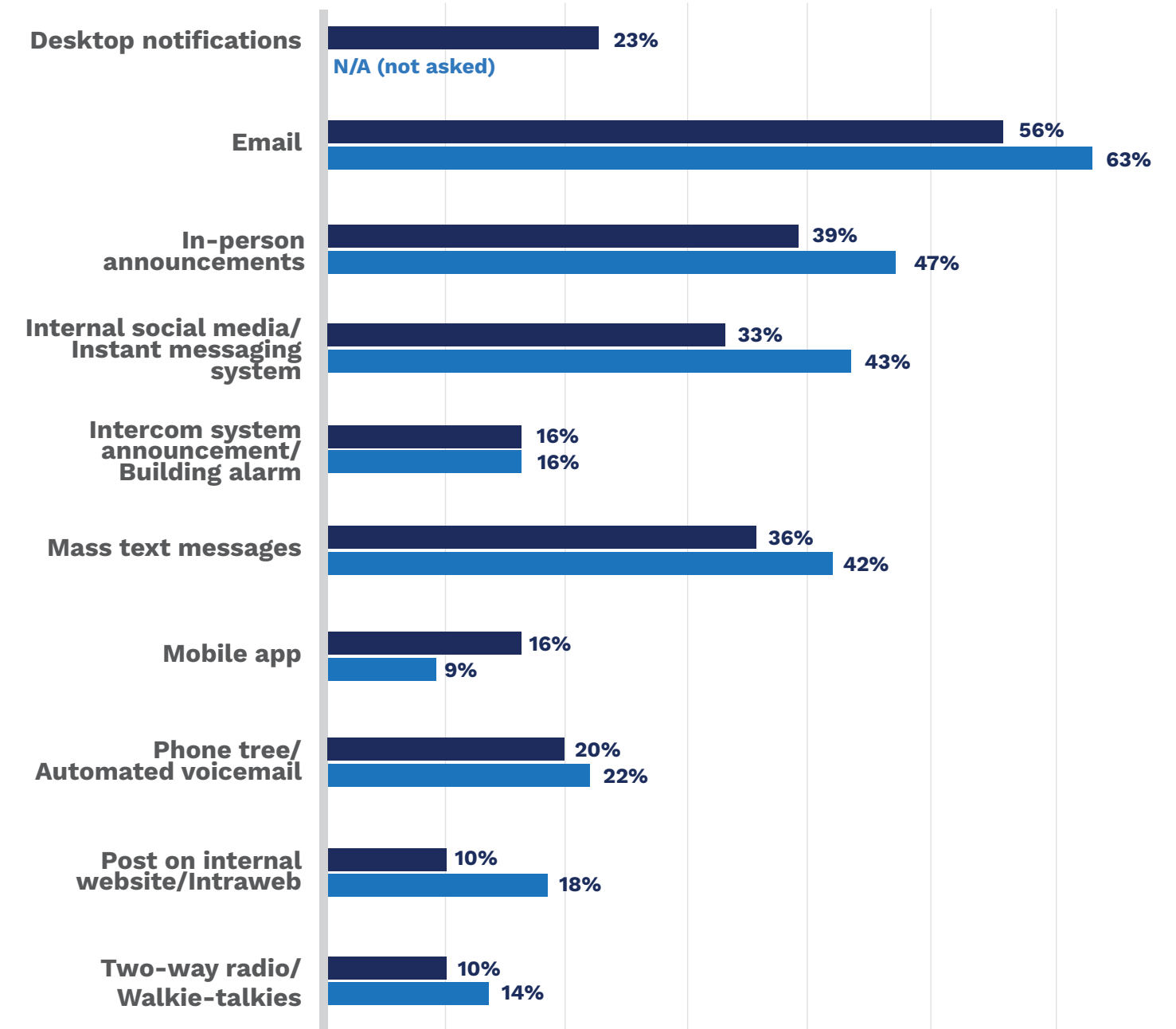
	METHODS EMPLOYERS USE	METHODS EMPLOYEES PREFER
18–29	Email	Email
30–44	Email	Mass text message
45–60	Email	Mass text message
60+	In-person announcement	Intercom system announcement/ Building alarm

Surprisingly, respondents from ages 18-29 showed a strong preference for email communication. This is a large reversal from last year's survey. In 2020, only 13% of this age group showed a penchant for email. This year, however, 45% named email as their channel of choice.

However, email can fall short when it comes to immediately notifying employees when they're away from their computer or traveling. In addition, it's likely that people can miss these alerts if they have paused notifications on their computer, are in a meeting, or are unable to distinguish an emergency email from the many other messages that are delivered to their inbox throughout the workday.

Current Emergency Communication Methods in Place (by Employer)

2021 Versus 2020

Desktop notifications: 23%
N/A (not asked)

Email: 56%
63%

In-person announcements: 39%
47%

Internal social media/ Instant messaging system: 33%
43%

Intercom system announcement/ Building alarm: 16%
16%

Mass text messages: 36%
42%

Mobile app: 16%
9%

Phone tree/ Automated voicemail: 20%
22%

Post on internal website/Intraweb: 10%
18%

Two-way radio/ Walkie-talkies: 10%
14%

Preferred Emergency Communication Methods (by Employee)

On-site Versus **Off-site**

Method	On-site	Off-site
Desktop notifications	23%	7%
Email	37%	22%
Internal social media/Instant messaging system	19%	9%
Intercom system/Building alarm	34%	N/A (not asked)
Mass text messages	47%	43%
Mobile app	19%	9%
Phone tree/Automated voicemail	16%	8%
Post on internal website/intraweb	8%	1%
Two-way radio/Walkie-talkies	12%	N/A (not asked)
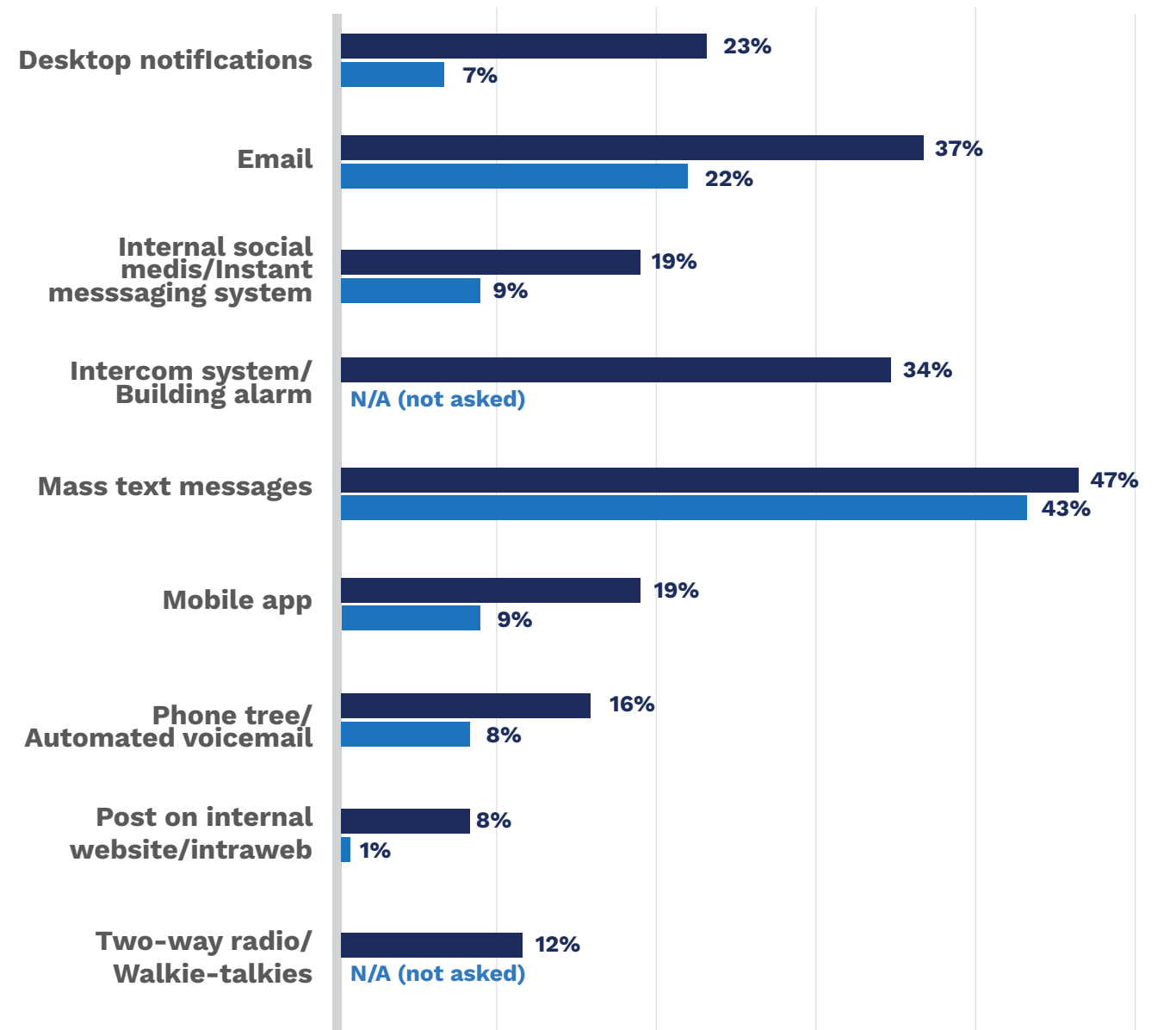
Facts on Remote Workers

34% Respondents who have spent less that 50% of their time in the workplace within the last 12 months

22% Are unable to access safety information such as emergency procedures or a call directory of important numbers

44% Would prefer to communicate via mass text messages in the event of a workplace emergency while they are working off-site or remotely

74% Say they generally or always feel safe while working

Three sectors continue to show room for improvement in critical communication

Employees in manufacturing, healthcare and those who worked for small and medium-sized businesses (SMB) with less than 250 employees generally feel safe while working, but differences in emergency preparedness by sector exist.

Manufacturing

> 56% of respondents are not required to do a safety check-in about their status while traveling to different locations outside the workplace.

> 31% say their employer considers their health and wellbeing to be somewhat, hardly or not at all important

> 42% of respondents said they have never held a safety drill for instances of workplace violence. 23% of respondents said they weren't sure if their employer had plans in place for this type of emergency.

Healthcare

> 32% of respondents who work in healthcare said their employer considers workplace safety to be somewhat, hardly or not at all important.

> 32% also said their employer considers their health and wellbeing to be somewhat, hardly or not at all important.

> Healthcare employees overwhelmingly preferred to receive emergency alerts via mass text messages, while working on-site (58%) and remotely (49%). However, 63% reported that their employer sent emergency notifications via email.

SMB

> Respondents employed by SMBs were more likely to have never performed emergency drills, including workplace violence (54%), system outages or cyberattacks (51%), active shooter incidents (50%) and hazardous materials incidents (50%).

> 25% of SMB respondents said they couldn't access safety information like emergency procedures or a call directory of important numbers.

> A majority (64%) of these respondents said they would report safety concerns even if they couldn't do so anonymously. However, 26% said they would only make a report confidentially, and 10% wouldn't report the issue at all.

About Rave Mobile Safety

Rave Mobile Safety is the leading provider of critical communication and collaboration technology used to save lives, manage crisis incidents and increase resiliency. From major disasters and crisis events to everyday emergencies and operational incidents, the Rave platform enables critical data sharing, mass notification and emergency response coordination. Over 8,000 first responder, emergency management, 9-1-1, and federal, state and local agencies—as well as corporations, healthcare organizations, universities and schools—all rely on Rave to prepare better, respond faster, recover quicker and mitigate anticipated critical incidents. Founded in 2004, Rave's award-winning software solutions are backed by leading growth equity firm TCV. Let Rave enable you to do all you can today™ to keep everyone safe. For more information, visit https://www.ravemobilesafety.com, read our company blog, and follow us on LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook.

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