

# Hot Topic

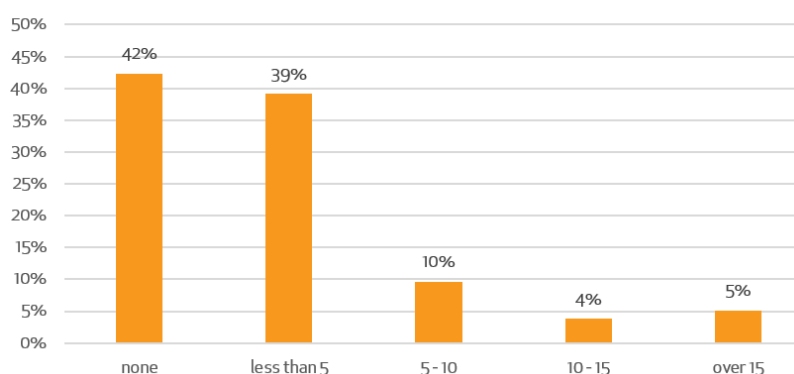
## SAFETY INSPECTIONS

In March 2019, Master Builders surveyed members to get a better understanding of how the recent changes to the way that Workplace Health and Safety Queensland (WHSQ) operates is being experienced on the ground.

While the majority of respondents (63 per cent) hadn't seen any increase in inspections on the previous 12 months, a significant proportion – one in three – had experienced an increase.

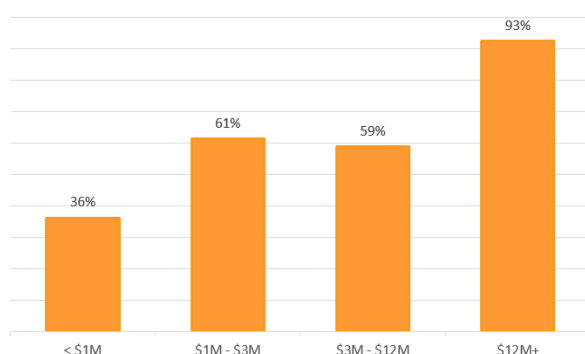
Nearly half (42 per cent) of respondents hadn't had any visit from a WHSQ inspector over the past 12 months, while another 39 per cent had had less than five visits; leaving one in five who had repeated inspector visits.

**WHSQ Inspector visits over past 12 months**

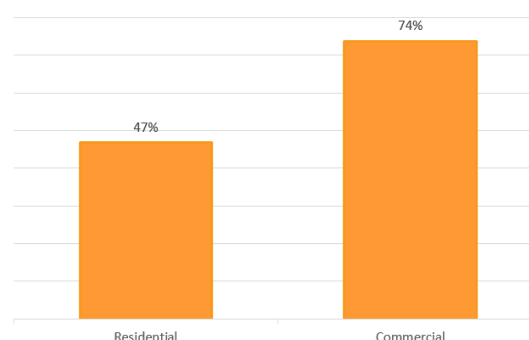


Nearly all visits (93 per cent) were to large companies with a turnover greater than \$12 million. The commercial sector is also being targeted with 74 per cent of respondents from this sector having had a visit from a WHSQ inspector.

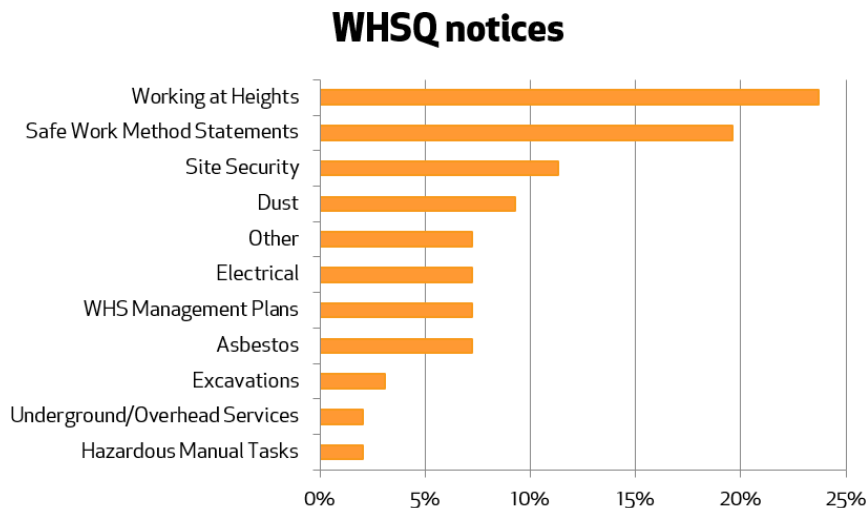
**WHSQ visits by business size**



**WHSQ visits by business sector**



One in three were issued with at least one notice, while 4 per cent were issued with more than five notices. The most common notice was for working at heights, closely followed by problems with the Safe Work Method Statements.



The majority of respondents had a very constructive relationship with the WHSQ inspector.

*I find them approachable when they come on site, easy to talk to.*

*Approachable and knowledgeable.*

*Very collaborative and engaging.*

*The drop-in on the job site was a good way to meet an inspector who knew about the technicalities of the job at hand and assisted in assuring we had done everything correctly.*

*Requested a visit and asked for their input and advice into meeting our obligations as an employer, and also got them to reconfirm to the employees that they also have obligations to themselves as well as others.*

There were respondents who felt that this collaborative approach was now changing to one of a more hard-line enforcement approach.

*There seems to be trend from instructional or helpful to a more punitive approach with little scope for error.*

*They are being told to fine, fine, fine. When onsite they are stressed; nice human beings trying to help us improve. They don't like the way they are expected to hand fines out without warnings/rectification notices.*

*Last year we would invite inspectors to meet our site teams at the start of a project. This year they have advised us not to invite them to our sites as they have a direction to be less lenient in regard to issuing notices and on the spot fines.*

*I would hope the fine system is not partially set up to self-fund itself.*

There were concerns that this new approach would compromise safety outcomes.

*It will create less transparency and collaboration and therefore will be to the detriment of workplace safety.*

*The more experienced inspectors see the new policies as undermining the good relationships they have built with the better companies in the industry.*

*Inspectors have been generally easy to deal with, however the enforcement policy has not been effective. The visits now have much more stigma.*

*It's easier working with someone than against them; then if there is a problem, it would be easier and quicker to resolve.*

*In my opinion WHSQ is misguided in terms of being effective in how they want it implemented, and how to educate all of the relevant people involved.*

The extent that the unions are triggering safety inspections was highlighted.

*Inspectors usually attend our sites due to requests from unions, who have arranged this prior to attending site. The unions will accompany the inspector for the duration and won't generally leave until they do.*

*The general feeling within the industry is that WHSQ inspectors have become an extension of the union movement.*

*I feel for the inspectors who are being bullied to push political agendas.*

The lack of skilling for the inspectors was raised as a concern.

*There are some very good inspectors however they are being overshadowed by inspectors who are impractical, have a lack of construction knowledge and hide behind notices and legislation.*

*Inspector was not forthcoming with the information they wanted us to provide to comply with an Improvement Notice.*

*The inspectors cannot give clarification on what is required for silica dust control.*

It was suggested that the role of each individual in keeping themselves safe be stressed more.

*There should be more involvement with the workers, to show them the legal and legislative obligations that can help towards safer standards on the building sites.*

*The industry needs to give people at risk, practical ways of how to look after themselves, which is sadly missing.*

*Don't assume that people cannot look after themselves and those around them. Give people the skills to deal with risk otherwise you just keep raising the safety bar, which is chronically self-defeating.*

Getting enforcement right is important beyond the immediate safety goals. It's also important for the health of our industry.

*We've already had one staff member leave and said that won't stay in the industry because of WHSQ fines. Others are saying if it gets any worse they will follow suit.*

*One of my young carpenters quit not long after he was verbally abused and ridiculed by the inspector for standing on the second rung of an extension ladder without three points of contact.*

*Our staff have been complaining that there is so much time wasted staying compliant, and worrying about getting fines that jobs are taking too long to complete.*

*We spend a lot of time and money on safety but the rogue operators can still come in cheap rates with ABN contractors (sham labour).*

*For all the WHSQ rules and regulations no one is interested who was responsible for creating the problem as it is easier to go the person who exposed it. We uncovered a problem which was created back in 1994. It has been very frustrating to be left with the original builder's non-compliant installation.*