INDUSTRY INSIGHTS

POWERFLEET®

Five critical safety insights reshaping modern warehouses

From operational blindspots to data-driven protection – the industry insights changing how warehouses manage risk.

Introduction

The material handling industry is at a turning point. Rising operational demands, persistent labour shortages, and a concerning rise in workplace incidents are prompting Australian companies to confront uncomfortable truths about safety and accountability.

Safe Work Australia's latest data reveals **200 workers lost their lives in workplace incidents during 2023**, with transport, postal, and warehousing operations accounting for the **highest number of fatalities at 51 deaths – representing 26% of all workplace fatalities**. These statistics highlight a critical truth: traditional warehouse safety practices are not keeping up with modern operational needs.

Through extensive discussions with industry leaders at events like CeMAT 2025, we have identified five key insights that are transforming how Australian warehouses approach safety, efficiency, and accountability.

1. Access control
2. Operational blindness
3. Proximity detection
4. Safety ROI
5. Adoption dynamics

1 Access control: Essential infrastructure, not an optional add-on

The conversation around access control has fundamentally shifted. What was once considered an administrative convenience is now recognised as foundational to workplace safety and liability management.

> “The moment you have access control on a forklift, immediately you have liability,” explains Ettienne Marais, Solutions Engineer at Powerfleet Australia. “Now, when an operator uses that forklift, he’s been identified, he knows he’s been identified, and he knows whatever he does now he’s liable for. If that immediately changes his behaviour, he’s less likely to take chances.”

Without knowing who operated which piece of equipment during an incident, investigations become more complicated, and liability questions may remain unresolved. More importantly, operators who are aware that their actions are being monitored show significantly better safety behaviours.

2 Operational blindness: The hidden costs of what you don't know

Perhaps the most striking revelation is how little warehouse managers actually know about their daily operations. Heat mapping, utilisation data, and movement patterns expose operational realities that often contradict management assumptions.

> "These are things that they don't have visibility on, and some of them might not have thought that something like that exists or could help them," Marais notes. "When warehouse managers see what the technology can reveal about their operations, they quickly recognise problems they hadn't noticed before. They begin connecting the data to real scenarios they've experienced in their facilities."

This operational blindness extends beyond just efficiency metrics. Managers often discover that their perceived "safe" zones are actually high-risk areas where pedestrians and forklifts frequently interact unsafely. **The data reveals patterns that manual observation misses:** which operators tend to take risks, where near misses happen most often, and how workflow inefficiencies contribute to dangerous behaviours.

However, not all businesses are prepared for this level of visibility. Some operations temporarily disable monitoring systems when they see documented proof of risky behaviours, while they create suitable HR policies and training protocols.

3 Proximity detection: The most wanted safety technology

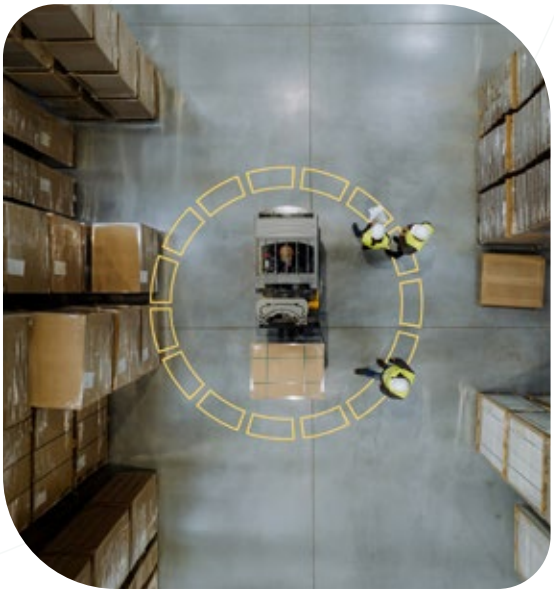
Proximity detection has become the most exciting technology for Australian warehouse operators, says Marais. The emphasis on pedestrian-forklift interactions highlights the seriousness of this particular risk.

Victoria alone reported 142 forklift-related injury claims in 2022, with 26 serious injury claims specifically involving pedestrians being struck by forklifts. Recent tragic incidents, including the death of a young worker crushed under a forklift at a site in southwest Sydney in July 2025, continue to underscore the urgency of this challenge.

> “There’s a big shift around everybody wanting proximity detection,” Marais observes. “Some people who get wind of it, they specifically came to us to see these AI cameras that can detect the distance between a forklift and a pedestrian.”

This technology tackles what many see as the most challenging safety problem in warehouses: the intersection of heavy machinery and pedestrian movement. Unlike traditional safety measures that depend on human awareness and adherence, proximity detection systems offer automated actions that can prevent incidents before they happen.

“We’re at the front end of that now, and it’s at the early adoption stage,” Marais added about proximity detection technology in Australia. “It’s very new in the market here, and people are already getting excited about it."



4 Safety ROI: Investment vs. incident economics

Cost concerns often cause hesitation in adopting safety technology, but industry leaders are increasingly recognising that delaying investment is a false economy. The financial case for proactive safety measures becomes clear when compared to incident costs.

In 2022, Victorian courts imposed fines totaling $697,500 on companies and directors in 11 prosecutions involving forklifts. These figures do not include the broader costs of lost productivity, higher insurance premiums, and damage to company reputation.

> “Just one incident creates massive costs,” Marais explains. “There’s the downtime, and if you don’t have cameras to show exactly what happened or who was liable, you face a full investigation. Everything gets shut down and becomes extremely expensive. When you compare that to the cost of safety technology, the investment becomes a no-brainer.”

5

Adoption dynamics:
Bridging the implementation gap

Despite obvious safety and economic benefits, technology adoption faces resistance at different organisational levels. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for successful implementation.

> “Operators might be less enthusiastic because they see it as an extra step before they can start their work,” Marais explains. “But managers and supervisors are much more supportive because they understand the benefits it brings to operations.”

This resistance pattern is predictable: operators see additional procedures and monitoring, while managers see data-driven insights and liability protection. However, successful implementations show that operator concerns can be addressed through proper training and by emphasising how technology protects them as well as the organisation.

Looking forward:
An industry in transition

These five insights point toward a fundamental change in how Australian warehouses approach safety. The move from reactive to predictive safety management represents more than just a technological step – it signifies a cultural shift toward accountability and transparency.

"We're at the front end of that now, and it's in the early adoption stage," Marais notes about the industry's embrace of advanced safety technologies. This early adoption phase offers both opportunity and urgency for warehouse operators.

The businesses leading this transformation understand that comprehensive safety systems provide dual benefits: protecting workers while strengthening operational performance. As regulatory scrutiny intensifies and the true costs of workplace incidents become clearer, technology-driven safety management is shifting from a competitive advantage to an essential part of operations.

The question facing Australian warehouse managers is not whether to adopt these technologies, but how quickly they can implement comprehensive safety systems that safeguard their most valuable assets: their people.

About Powerfleet

Powerfleet (www.powerfleet.com) is a global leader in AI-powered IoT solutions, helping organisations unify data from across their operations to drive safety, efficiency, and innovation. With a strategic focus on unified operations, Powerfleet empowers enterprises to simplify complexity, act on real-time insights, and unlock the full potential of their connected assets.