

Do-It-Yourself Safety Management System

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You've heard long ago that big commercial operators are required to have a Safety Management System (SMS) and that the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) requires it for noncommercial operators too.

The alphabet soup continues with IS-BAH (International Standard for Business Aircraft Handling), CIOP (Continuous Improvement Opportunity Program), HIT (Hazard Identification Tracking) and on and on. You've also heard that SMS is something the U.S. FAA has become concerned with. But how do you get started, especially if you do not have the budget to pay for a "boutique SMS" program?

There are many training vendors that will get you up to speed for a price and others that will write your SMS program for you for an even higher price. All of this may serve to intimidate leaders of smaller flight departments into thinking that SMS is too big a challenge to tackle. That is not true. If you do not have an SMS program, you need to get started with two questions: why and how?

Why?

Besides the obvious "You have to," the reason you need an SMS program is that it will make your operation safer, and it will prevent accidents. I was skeptical when we started down this road with my flight department in 2008, thinking SMS was just another business school fad. But over the years the SMS has generated countless suggestions from our staff that has made all facets of flight and ground operations more effective and has come up with solutions to problems that I could not have imagined on my own. For example, when we moved to a larger aircraft, I was afraid of hangar rash because of the reduced wingtip clearance with our hangar doors. Our SMS team came up with painted lines for the tow operator and unique protocols for our wing walkers. Since these were solutions from the group, the group enthusiastically uses these protocols.

You can easily make a few phone calls and find a vendor who will take your existing manuals and interview your people to come up with a comprehensive SMS program. If you are worried about the expense or time, you can try coming up with your own program. In either case, I recommend you design your own program as a starting point. You can do this in a few hours using the 12 steps outlined in ICAO Annex 19, Safety Management, Appendix 2, “Framework for a Safety Management System.” These steps constitute the minimum requirements for SMS implementation.

1. Management’s commitment to safety policy and objectives

This is simply a signed statement from an accountable executive of the organization saying the company stands by the safety program. Ideally, it outlines support for anyone in the organization reporting hazards and other risks.

2. Safety accountability and responsibilities

Identifies the person who implements and maintains the SMS. In our flight department, we identify all personnel as safety officers and the person who runs the SMS as the Director of Safety.

3. Appointment of key safety personnel

At least one safety manager is needed to maintain the SMS. For us, this is the Director of Safety.

4. Coordination of emergency response planning

You need to have an emergency response plan that is coordinated with organizations needed during an emergency. This can be as simple as a phone list of local first responders posted near hangar phones and a regular meeting in the flight department playing “what if” scenarios to practice emergency events.

5. SMS documentation

You need an “SMS Manual,” but it can be integrated into your flight department’s operations manual. We use a “Company Operations Manual” that includes all 12 of these elements.

6. Hazard identification

You need a “process” to identify hazards. This can be as simple as a form on a clipboard and an inbox for the safety officer.

7. Safety risk assessment and mitigation

You should have a way of addressing hazards. We give our safety officer the latitude to deal with the easy problems on the spot, or to convene small meetings with the concerned individuals to come up with solutions.

8. Safety performance monitoring and measurement

You should have a way to verify your safety performance. This can be an annual examination of whatever documentation you have accumulated and answering the question, “have we done what we said we would do?”

9. The management of change

You need a “process to identify changes which may affect the level of safety risk.” We have a list of things to look at whenever we have a change in personnel, aircraft, or other equipment.

10. Continuous improvement

You need to monitor and assess your SMS to continuously improve it. This can be nothing more than a “suggestion box” from the troops that your flight department looks at now and then, answering the question, “how can we do this better?”

11. Training and education

You need a safety training program to ensure everyone is trained and competent to perform their SMS duties. There are a variety of e-Learning courses available, including ones from the NBAA, FlightSafety International and other recognized training vendors. We alternate these with in-house events taught by our Director of Safety.

12. Safety communication

You need to ensure your personnel know about the SMS program. We have quarterly meetings conducted in our hangar for those wi

My flight department started down this path in 2008 using a five-page Microsoft Word Document that blossomed into a robust Company Operations Manual that has sailed through multiple audits. We started with nothing and now have Standard Operating Procedures that keep everyone in the flight department on the same page headed for a common goal. No doubt about it, we are better aviators because of SMS.

The fact we receive an annual 15% reduction in our insurance policies is icing on the cake!

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