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# How to be a safety manager

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**Cover photo:**

// As safety manager it's important to be confident and be able to communicate with all involved in the operation, from staff and management, to clients, to other contractors, and the CAA. //

Emma Tilyard, Safety Manager, V3 Heli Ltd.  
Photo courtesy of V3 Heli Ltd.



// Our pilots, ground crew and I share safety-critical information and advice, including CAA safety bulletins, *Vector* articles, safety alerts sent out by companies we contract to, and information about incidents/accidents in

Every effort is made to ensure the information in this booklet is accurate and up-to-date at the time of publishing, but numerous changes can occur with time, especially in regard to airspace and legislation. Readers are reminded to obtain appropriate up-to-date information.

See the CAA website for Civil Aviation Rules, advisory circulars, airworthiness directives, forms, and more safety publications. Visit [aviation.govt.nz](http://aviation.govt.nz).



# Introduction

It's not about the nuts 'n' bolts.

A safety manager is a professional with a sound understanding of safety management principles, procedures, and activities. These include finding aviation safety hazards, mitigating risks, and monitoring.

You're responsible for overseeing and coordinating all policies related to the safety management system (SMS).

While you're the focal point for safety in the organisation, *you don't manage safety and risk alone.*

Think of a chief financial officer – they oversee the making and handling of money for the company, but they don't, themselves, make that money.

In the same way, a safety manager oversees safety initiatives, monitors the effectiveness of risk controls and liaises on safety matters throughout the organisation.

You should be aware of the risks that could affect aviation safety in your organisation. But you may not be as aware of the best controls against those risks as, say, the chief pilot or chief engineer. You advise them of course. You guide them and smooth the way for them to manage risk, and you monitor and evaluate the controls put in place.

You need to be available to provide advice and encouragement to *all* staff on safety management matters, but it's not your responsibility to tighten every nut and replace every bolt.

It's important that safety management is a shared responsibility throughout the entire organisation, from the chief executive officer to the school student who washes the aircraft twice a week.

the wider aviation industry. These all provide opportunities to learn, and help improve our own workplace safety. We actively *discuss* safety rather than me just pinning a poster on the hangar notice board. //

Wendy Worters, Safety Manager,  
Eastland Heli Services.

//

My role is to promote a positive safety culture within our business by ensuring everyone has the opportunity to 'have a say'. Maintaining good systems makes sure that safety information is shared.

//

Kelly Dodson, Marlborough Helicopters



Here are some of the responsibilities that do belong to the safety manager:

- managing the implementation of a safety management system
- identifying hazards and helping others to do the same
- facilitating risk management
- communicating safety-critical information
- monitoring corrective and preventive actions to make sure they're accomplished
- advising the management team on safety
- monitoring measures taken to mitigate risk
- reporting regularly to management on the operation's safety performance against the operation's goals and objectives
- maintaining relevant records
- planning and leading staff safety training
- providing advice on safety matters
- looking out for safety issues in the wider industry and how they might relate to the operation
- collecting and analysing safety data, then distributing throughout the organisation
- initiating or participating in internal safety investigations
- facilitating safety meetings throughout the organisation – these could be anything from impromptu cup of tea chats, to formal and minuted meetings
- communicating with the CAA and international organisations on issues relating to safety.

# Attitude and enthusiasm

**//** Chris Fordyce, Safety Manager,  
Precision Helicopters NZ, Blenheim

In such an inherently dangerous industry, a real passion for making tasks safer is a must. Your commitment and enthusiasm will be the force that delivers a successful safety strategy benefitting everyone.

The job is never finished! The more you learn, the more you'll realise just how much more there is to know.

If you attend a basic SMS course, you'll learn a great deal in a short space of time, and you'll quickly know if a safety manager's role is right for you.

You could, at first, feel daunted by the task but if you break it down into manageable segments, like a jigsaw it will eventually all come together.

A safety manager needs to be open to new ideas and be progressive, but always weigh those ideas against the safety of the operation and its staff.

Your attitude and enthusiasm count for a lot and can be really infectious.





# How are your people skills?

That may seem an unusual question to ask someone who wants to work in safety, but people skills are some of the most important attributes a safety manager can have.

A crucial part of your job is to encourage staff to get engaged with and be enthusiastic about safety; to report incidents; to keep an eye out for hazards and report those; and to assume personal responsibility to manage risk – in short, to be mindful of safety in everything they do.

If you're a success, people should feel comfortable sharing experiences and issues with you, and have the confidence you will act on their concerns. You need to be a real mentor and leader in establishing a safety culture in the operation.

Other personal qualities desirable in a safety manager include:

- analytical and problem-solving skills
- oral and written communication skills
- project management skills.

A safety manager (the official title is 'senior person responsible for the system for safety management') needs to know about the features of aviation-specific safety. This includes knowledge of the organisation's specific operations and environment – so a technical background (so you can understand the systems supporting operations) and operational experience are also desirable.

But to be a safety manager, you don't have to have a 'certain number' of years in aviation. You might, for instance, come from a health and safety background. With upskilling in aviation safety principles, and with the right attitude and commitment, you can become an effective safety manager.

What is more important is being 'competent'. So what does that mean? Competence is the combination of knowledge (about risk management for instance), skills (for engaging with other staff members, for instance) and a positive attitude towards the importance of safety and the place of rules, in achieving that safety.

These qualities are needed, no matter what size your organisation is. Your role and responsibilities in a mid-sized air transport operation aren't going to be very different from being a safety manager in a three-person agricultural operation.

But in a three-person operation, you may be the chief pilot, as well as the safety manager and the senior person for investigating occurrences. This raises potential conflicts of interest. How do you, as safety manager, investigate an occurrence involving you as chief pilot? How do you, as the safety manager, audit the work of the maintenance controller, also you? What happens if the investigation you carry out as the safety manager finds deficiencies in crew training, when you are also the senior person responsible for crew training and competency assessment?

The safety officer of a small operation must always be able to demonstrate objectivity.

One answer, of course, is to hire someone from outside the operation to carry out audits and investigations, or to at least review what you have done in your investigations and audits.





## You have to *listen*

**// Robert Cavers, Safety and Quality  
Director (International) HNZ**

Listening is the key skill. When somebody reports that something has gone wrong, you have to *listen*, and understand the context of what's happened, from the storyteller's viewpoint.

Nobody comes to work inherently wanting to take risks. They want to do the right thing every day. So when you finally get that 'reporting valve' open, don't snap it off again by rushing to judgement when people report.

My job is to facilitate the awareness of everyone in the organisation as to the part they play in safety, and the controls they're each responsible for.

I have safety officers throughout the organisations. I give them the tools and the capability to make their contribution to safety, and I have the access to the CEO.

I'm the orchestra leader; but I don't play the instruments.

The challenge for the safety manager is one of 'safety sales': you have to sell the concept of a safety management system to frontline staff and management. If you can't, the SMS is dead.

Photo courtesy of  
Charteris Choppers.

// We're only a team of three, and two of us own the operation. So it would be easy for the third person – our ground crew – to feel uneasy about speaking up regarding safety issues. They could feel like their ideas and opinion don't count for as much as ours.

But I wanted everyone to feel part of the process – that way they will actually use it going forward. So I need to be approachable and have everyone feel valued and respected. Taking this path was the best thing for our team. Our ground crew really does speak up and share his ideas, which we love because he has really good ones. //

Sarah Charteris, Safety Manager, Charteris Choppers





The senior person interview is about 90 minutes long so it's wise to prepare properly for it.

# Safety manager as a senior person

The criteria that apply to any other senior persons apply to the safety manager.

The applicant has to undergo the senior person assessment, done as part of SMS certification and ongoing recertification activity.

There's information about this process at [aviation.govt.nz](http://aviation.govt.nz): search on 'senior person' or you can email [publications@caa.govt.nz](mailto:publications@caa.govt.nz) for a free copy of the booklet *How to be a senior person*.

Briefly, because of the safety-critical nature of the role of senior person, the CAA has to be as sure as it can be that you will carry out the role effectively.

You have to pass what's known as a 'fit and proper person' test. Visit [aviation.govt.nz](http://aviation.govt.nz) > licensing and certification > fit and proper person process.

You'll be interviewed by the CAA about your expertise, knowledge, and attitudes so the Director of Civil Aviation can make sure you demonstrate competence and experience sufficient to be a safety manager.

The interview is about 90 minutes long so it's wise to prepare properly for it. *How to be a senior person* will give you more details.

Having enough time to do justice to the role is one of the more important requirements of any senior person, including the safety manager.

If you're combining your role as a safety manager with another role, or roles; if you're so busy, you're not on site very often, if you're trying to carry out the role by cell phone, you're probably not really going to be that effective. You need to be able to demonstrate to the Director you can fulfil your role as a safety manager effectively.

You need to be around to do the job properly – to give advice and encouragement to the chief executive, line managers, and staff on safety-related matters. That may not be so easy, if you visit the organisation only occasionally.

You also have to have the right resources and enough of them; and the authority to make decisions about safety that will be taken on by staff. That's largely the CEO's responsibility.

The CEO must show the rest of the staff that they are committed to what the safety manager is doing. That's not just a matter of saying they're committed. The CEO must also provide the resources needed for the safety manager to do their job properly, and model, by their actions, that they are participating, supporting, and engaged with the safety programme.

# Communication is number one

**// Linda Cook, Safety Manager,  
New Plymouth Airport**

My main role is to get engagement from the airport community. I make sure they know I respect them and trust them and I want to hear what they have to say about safety.

Giving everyone a role and responsibility in safety lets them know you value their opinions and their expertise.

If you've got their trust, they will feed the safety system with information, and compliance should follow.

SMS drives change, so bring that change in subtly; and make sure your community understands why the SMS is being established, and its benefits.

The ability to communicate clearly and effectively in all forms – from meetings to emails – is number one. After reports, clearly communicate any follow-up action. Be aware of your non-verbal behaviour because that also tells people what you're thinking.

You serve as a safety point of contact within the airport community. You share insights and lessons, but you're not the exclusive 'owner' of safety and risk management. Everyone has a part to play.



Photo courtesy of  
New Plymouth Airport.



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**Good Aviation Practice**

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PO Box 3555  
Wellington 6140

Tel: +64 4 560 9400  
Fax: +64 4 569 2024

Email: [info@caa.govt.nz](mailto:info@caa.govt.nz)

New Zealand Government

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To request publications such as GAPs and posters email: [publications@caa.govt.nz](mailto:publications@caa.govt.nz).

**[aviation.govt.nz](http://aviation.govt.nz)**

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