

Your SMS is Yours and Yours Alone

Your SMS needs to be tailored specifically to your operation to manage your risks and build a safety culture that works for you.

No two aviation organisations are quite the same. You might run a similar operation to your neighbour, but your staff, aircraft, premises, hazards, and associated risks may be totally different. That's why your SMS needs to be tailored to your business.

"You can't just pick up a template and insert your name and be done," says Chris Lamain from the CAA's SMS team.

Developing an SMS plan is different from the ordinary process of writing an exposition.

Some organisations may make use of a consultant to develop their implementation plan (as part of the broader SMS implementation process) – and that's fine, providing they really understand your business.

Most experienced consultants deal with safety across a range of codes of practice and legislation.

"Consultants can be very valuable to your business but they need to spend time on site and talk with your staff. If they don't, how can they best understand your business?" says Chris.

One consultant who works with several organisations on their SMS implementation is Heather Andrews. Understanding the organisation is her first priority.

"I need to thoroughly understand the organisation, including its goals and objectives," says Heather. "What the company structure looks like; what certificates it has, and any codes of practice that may be relevant to the organisation.

"Once I understand that, I do a 'gap analysis' against the relevant standard based on the organisation's exposition. This helps the organisation identify the best way to close those gaps. From there, a work plan can be implemented with accountabilities."

Heather says that the most important part of any SMS is commitment from senior management.

"There should be regular involvement of senior management, including the CEO, through attendance at safety committee meetings and training sessions," says Heather.

"Cultural changes are difficult to achieve, so an effective implementation plan needs to provide plenty of time for training sessions and for people to become comfortable with the new processes.

"If staff see senior management interested in safety then they also will have more commitment to the SMS."

Heather says that time management is another major advantage in using an external consultant.

"Planning SMS implementation takes time. Sometimes these projects get left to the last minute and may not get completed to a standard that reflects the organisation. Using an external consultant can mean these projects get addressed in a timely manner."

Chris Lamain adds, "Your consultant needs to actively work with you, not just for you, to ensure your SMS truly is yours and yours alone – your ownership is vital to building and fostering a robust safety culture."

Further Information

For more information refer to the CAA web site, www.caa.govt.nz, "Safety Management Systems (SMS)". You can also check out the articles "SMS – What it Means for You" and "Risk – Where to Begin", in the March/April 2016 edition of *Vector*. ■