Australian Government
Civil Aviation Safety Authority

SAFETY MANAGER GUIDE

WHO THIS GUIDE IS FOR:

- Anyone who may appoint a Safety Manager (normally the CEO/AM)
- Anyone who is part of the department responsible for hiring a Safety Manager
- Anyone who currently holds the position of Safety Manager, or intends to
- Anyone who has a responsibility to support a Safety Manager.

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INTRODUCTION

Users of aviation services and society more generally are demanding ever increasing levels of safety within the aviation industry. Not only in Australia but across the world, communities are becoming increasingly intolerant of lapses in aviation safety. As a result, the aviation industry is being required, both through regulation as well as the expectations of customers, employees, financial institutions and insurance companies, to manage the safety of operations in a more robust manner.

The role of Safety Manager has now become formalised and one of the most important key positions within many aviation companies. It has therefore become an integral part of an organisation's management team.

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THE SAFETY MANAGER

A Safety Manager oversees all things safety within an organisation. Large organisations may have a dedicated safety department or section with additional people and resources such as safety officers, safety committees and data analysts.

Small organisations may simply have an individual Safety Manager working either full-time or part-time or may have these responsibilities added to their existing role. Small organisations may contract out the responsibilities of this role to a third-party service provider offering safety management services to a number of similar sized companies. Regardless of how the Safety Manager may be employed, the ultimate accountability for the safety performance of the organisation still rests with the chief executive officer, board and company owners.

COMMITMENT TO THE SAFETY MANAGER ROLE

An organisation must commit to appropriately resourcing and supporting the Safety Manager in their role. It is essential that a Safety Manager be provided with the opportunity to build and, perhaps more importantly, maintain their safety related skills and technical knowledge. Unfortunately, some Safety Managers upon taking up their roles are provided with little if any training and development in the skills required for this crucial position.

Organisations cannot afford to view the employment of a Safety Manager as either a financial burden, an inconvenience or something that must be done only to satisfy a regulatory requirement. The level and quality of training and resources provided to a Safety Manager and/or a safety department is often a reliable indication as to how an organisation and their senior management views safety as a whole.

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SAFETY MANAGER RESPONSIBILITIES

Safety Managers are primarily responsible for managing all aspects of the planning, implementation and day-to-day operation of an organisation's safety management system (SMS). Additionally, the Safety Manager is often tasked with a wide range of other responsibilities and, most importantly, integrating these into a functioning and effective SMS by:

- providing safety advice and mentoring to management, staff and contractors
- maintaining a safety reporting system to identify and manage safety related hazards and risks

- investigating or coordinating the investigation of accidents and incidents
- identifying and often facilitating ongoing staff training to support SMS objectives
- overseeing internal and external safety audit programs
- maintaining the company's emergency response plan
- promoting general safety awareness and the development of a healthy safety culture within the company
- providing management with data to assess the performance of the SMS and the areas where improvement is required.

BUILDING A HEALTHY SAFETY CULTURE

The development and on-going promotion of a healthy safety culture is an important responsibility for any Safety Manager. This responsibility comes with significant challenges, not least of which is that a safety culture is not a tangible thing, but is 'an enduring set of beliefs, norms, attitudes and practices within an organisation concerned at minimising exposure of the workforce and the general public to dangerous or hazardous conditions'.
CASA SMS Toolkit Edition 2: 2014

The role of company management in this instance is critical. Employees will invariably look to the CEO, the Safety Manager and the wider management team more generally to set the tone of how safety is viewed within a company and establish the importance of a healthy safety culture.

A healthy safety culture is one in which:

- senior management place a strong emphasis on safety as part of the strategy of controlling risks
- senior management foster a climate where there is a positive attitude towards constructive criticism and feedback from lower levels within the organisation
- established and supported standards for acceptable behaviour exist
- errors and violations are managed in an objective, fair and accountable manner
- personnel are well trained and fully understand the consequences of unsafe acts
- decision makers and operational personnel hold realistic views of the short and long-term hazards involved in an organisation's activities

- those in senior positions do not use their influence to force their views on other levels of the organisation or avoid criticism
- a company looks to internal responsibility rather than regulatory compliance to achieve safety objectives.

A healthy safety culture is built largely at the organisational level within any company. Operational personnel in aviation are influenced in their day-to-day behaviour by the value system of their organisation which plays a large role in determining characteristics such as:

Does the organisation:

- place a high value on safety?
- promote individual initiative?
- enforce strict compliance with standard operating procedures (SOPs) or do they tolerate breaches of SOPs?
- actively promote open two-way communication?

The culture of the organisation sets the boundaries for what is acceptable operational performance in the workplace by establishing the norms and limits of behaviour, thereby providing a cornerstone for managerial and employee decision-making.

The Safety Manager and other senior managers must always lead by example and be seen to live out the principles of a healthy safety culture every day. This is where the attitude, drive and enthusiasm displayed by the Safety Manager is so important.

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SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES OF A SAFETY MANAGER

The skills and attributes required of an effective Safety Manager are many and varied. They range from soft skills such as leadership and communication to more technical skills such as a sound knowledge of the principles behind safety management, human factors, accident and incident investigation and risk analysis.

Here are some of the more important skills and behaviours that anyone intending to move into a Safety Manager position or those currently working in the role should possess.

Energy and enthusiasm

A Safety Manager will only be successful if they approach their role with a level of enthusiasm and commitment that encourages all parts of the company to buy-in to the safety system and develop a shared commitment to improving safety. A Safety Manager will possess natural leadership skills, where they lead by example and bring people with them on the safety journey.

Not only must a Safety Manager have the right attitude, they need to be consistently seen by the wider workforce as demonstrating this commitment to safety in the day-to-day operations of the company. A Safety Manager must be able to demonstrate that actions always speak louder than words – especially in high consequence industries such as aviation. An inherent passion for safety and a desire to champion the safety message will go a long way to making an effective Safety Manager.

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People skills

The ability to engage honestly and openly with people at all levels from the CEO down to the most junior employee is crucial. A Safety Manager is most definitely a role that suits a 'people person' who is not only respected in the workplace but is both approachable and naturally at ease in dealing with a variety of people and personalities.

A Safety Manager must remain committed to having a visible presence in all parts of a company's operations. This is especially important when an organisation operates at several geographically dispersed locations and/or remote bases. This commitment to being visible, approachable and available will go a long way to building levels of trust within the workforce which will increase both the quality and quantity of safety reporting and information flowing into the safety system.

The role of Safety Manager demands a high degree of personal integrity and the ability to maintain confidences. It takes significant time and effort to establish high levels of trust within a workforce, but this can be lost in an instant should a Safety Manager not demonstrate the right people skills. An ability to use discretion and tact when regularly dealing with sensitive information is also required. A Safety Manager also needs to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances and be able to process large volumes of information from a wide range of sources. An ability to think on one's feet with often limited supervision is also required.

Communication

Effective communication is an essential part of the Safety Manager's skill set as both written and verbal communication are needed to effectively get across critical safety messaging. A Safety Manager must also be able to communicate in ways that are suitably tailored to a wide range of audiences, whether that is the company CEO, the regulator, third party contractors or workers on the hangar floor. In organisations where different cultures are working together and English might not be the first language to some of the workforce, the ability of the Safety Manager to communicate effectively takes on an even greater importance.

Good communication is two-way and also includes the ability and desire to listen. Employees will quickly work out for themselves whether a Safety Manager is really listening and therefore interested in what they are saying. Being able to listen to what is happening at the coalface is essential if the Safety Manager wants to build an accurate picture of the true level of safety within an organisation.

Not only is listening and receiving information important, but the Safety Manager needs to provide regular, timely and meaningful feedback from all identified safety related issues and concerns. As soon as feedback from hazard reports or safety related concerns dries up, so too will employees' motivation to contribute their observations and concerns. This reduced reporting will lead to a rapid decline in hazard identification and ultimately the overall effectiveness of the safety effort, hence increasing risk.

A Safety Manager must have the ability to communicate effectively and liaise as appropriate, not only within their own organisations, but also represent the company when dealing with a range of external audiences and regulatory authorities such as the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) and the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB).

Role specific skills and knowledge

While it would be unrealistic to expect a Safety Manager to be a complete expert in every discipline involved in an aviation business, they should possess enough technical background to have at least a general understanding of the many systems that support aviation operations.

A Safety Manager ideally needs to have (or be given the appropriate resources and training to quickly develop) a solid knowledge of:

- principles of SMS
- accident and incident investigation
- hazard identification and risk management
- human factors
- root-cause analysis
- development and delivery of safety related training and assessment.

SAFETY MANAGER AS KEY PERSONNEL

Many of the Civil Aviation Safety Regulations (CASRs) contain a requirement for organisations to appoint key personnel such as a CEO and a head of operations. The other key personnel position required of a number of operational regulations is one of 'Safety Manager'.

Because of the nature of the Safety Manager role, CASA, as the aviation industry regulator, must be satisfied the person occupying this position has the skills, knowledge and attitudes to be able to carry out the role effectively. CASA may, in the approval process for a Safety Manager, conduct an interview with the candidate to ensure the applicant is able to adequately manage the safety of operations in accordance with applicable regulations while of course taking into account the nature and complexity of the company's activities.

More specifically, the Safety Manager assessment interview allows CASA to gain an understanding of how the applicant understands their responsibilities, intends to perform their role within the organisation and their understanding of how the SMS actually works within the company. Typical questions that a candidate may be asked during a CASA interview for approval are:

- how will you promote the safety policies established for your organisation?
- can you describe your company's safety reporting system and processes, including how internal safety reports are submitted?
- how do you ensure the CEO is kept adequately informed of safety matters?
- can you describe the SMS implementation plan for your company and how will you manage this?
- can you describe the risk assessment protocols and procedures for your company?
- can you describe the emergency response plan for your company and your associated responsibilities?

Areas where Safety Manager candidates often struggle to successfully respond in the CASA interview are:

- failure to understand the hierarchy of aviation legislation and how that applies to their organisation
- lack of knowledge of the certificates and authorisations held by the organisation that describe what the organisation can do
- an inability to describe the structure of the organisation
- poor knowledge of the organisation's SMS manual. While an encyclopaedic knowledge of the manual is not necessary, candidates should know where to find the information
- an inability to describe in a practical way, the application of risk management principles. This is critical given that risk management is at the heart of an SMS
- lack of appreciation of how business as usual activities connect into safety management.

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CHALLENGES IN THE ROLE OF SAFETY MANAGER

Time and resources

Many Safety Managers, especially in smaller companies, often find themselves having to wear two or three different hats in their work where only one of these might be devoted to the role of Safety Manager. It is important that anyone in the Safety Manager role, and especially those that are fulfilling other tasks as part of their employment are provided with sufficient time and resources to do the job properly. If the individual concerned is either so busy they are either not on site very often or having to carry out their Safety Manager function largely by mobile phone, they are unlikely to be fully effective in the role.

It is certainly acknowledged that having a well trained and resourced Safety Manager in place can represent a cost on a company. However, the potential for preventing considerable personal, financial, legal and reputational damage from what might have been otherwise unforeseen hazards by having this dedicated resource is also considerable.

There are many instances of organisations that seem to have a high turnover of Safety Managers. Safety Managers who do not remain in the role for very long means the whole recruitment and induction process must be regularly repeated. Not only is this a cost on the company, but it also hinders the smooth running of the SMS and the effectiveness of the safety effort as a whole. Organisations where the Safety Manager role appears to be a continuously revolving door often suffer at the same time from an indifferent approach to safety by senior management.

There is an old saying, 'if you think safety is expensive, then try having an accident!!' Although employing a Safety Manager is certainly no guarantee of being accident free, having a well trained and resourced Safety Manager running an effective SMS will likely give any company a greater chance of avoiding such an event.

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Safety is a shared responsibility

It is important to realise that safety within any organisation is very much a responsibility shared by all members of the workforce. While a Safety Manager is certainly the focal point for safety within an organisation, it is not their role to manage safety and risk on their own. Company boards, owners and accountable managers own the risks, *not* the Safety Manager. It follows that the Safety Manager should not be held accountable for the overall safety performance of the organisation. That accountability ultimately rests with the CEO.

However, the Safety Manager is accountable for providing effective support to managers and the workforce to ensure the success of the organisation's safety management effort and communicating safety related risks directly to management.

Safety is very much a shared responsibility that is commensurate with the various roles and authorities that people hold within a company. A Safety Manager cannot be everywhere at the one time, so it is important the Safety Manager clearly communicates through their words and

actions that everyone has a stake and plays their role in the ongoing safety effort and the successful running of an SMS.

Additionally, the Safety Manager may not always have the capacity to conduct every audit and investigation that the organisation needs to complete and as such the Safety Manager may need to be appropriately supported with people and other resources by the company to complete these functions.

Safety is more than just posters

The role of a Safety Manager is more than just putting up posters on noticeboards every month. It is a hands-on role that should be in constant communication with every part of an organisation. The Safety Manager needs to be an advocate for safety who is constantly encouraging, mentoring and leading the entire workforce in the sharing of safety information and working alongside all employees to identify and discuss hazards and then cooperatively find solutions.

Again, communication and leadership in this role is essential. Interactions with employees could be as informal as a toolbox talk on the hangar floor during morning tea to regularly scheduled and formally minuted safety meetings with representatives from all parts of the organisation.

Safety Managers need to work hard at gaining the trust and respect of the workforce. The role demands a real commitment to being out and about with the workforce every day, listening to people and dealing with their safety related concerns. The Safety Manager role cannot be performed effectively by hiding away from people in an office.

A bridge to management

The Safety Manager is in many ways the eyes and ears of senior management when it comes to the safe operation of the company. To reflect the importance of this key position, the Safety Manager should report directly to the company CEO or have direct access to the CEO and other management on safety related matters at all times. This ensures the Chief Executive has full visibility on the overall level of safety within their organisation and the key risks that the organisation is managing. This function is especially critical in large and/or geographically dispersed operations where management might not have adequate visibility of many of the safety issues faced by the workforce every day.

Although the Safety Manager has responsibility for the day to day running of the SMS and all its associated functions and requirements, it is still the CEO who has ultimate accountability for the safe running of the company's operations.

Authority to do the job

A Safety Manager must have the appropriate authority to be able to perform all aspects of the role properly. This goes beyond just having direct access to the CEO and senior management but also the authority to:

- conduct audits, surveys and inspections as appropriate and direct other areas of the company to provide any required information
- conduct investigations and be able to access and speak to all involved parties while operating in accordance with the procedures specified in the organisation's SMS
- liaise as appropriate with regulatory authorities on behalf of the company.

Staying connected and informed

A Safety Manager must be committed to staying connected with what else might be happening within their industry with regards to safety. It is a position that cannot be successfully carried out in isolation. An ability to access the latest safety information, data analysis and accident and incident reports outside the company is important. Whilst ever mindful of the inevitable commercial considerations, cross pollination of ideas, and the sharing of experiences and solutions with other Safety Managers in similar organisations can be a valuable information source that can be used to improve everyone's safety.

The professional relationships the Safety Manager develops and maintains with safety colleagues from outside the organisation can be of enormous benefit to those in this role. These relationships should certainly be encouraged as they can be enormously beneficial to a Safety Manager especially when inexperienced and still establishing themselves into the role.

TEN GOOD HABITS OF ANY SAFETY MANAGER

1. Always leading by example
2. Being visible to all the workforce
3. Being approachable
4. Ensuring everyone knows safety is a shared responsibility
5. Making full use of the expertise within your organisation
6. Always providing timely feedback to staff
7. Training your people in safety
8. Praising or even rewarding employees for reporting hazards
9. Looking for even small advances in safety every day
10. Seeking help and resources when you need them

WHERE CAN I GO FOR MORE INFORMATION?

CASA website casa.gov.au/sms

CASA Safety Management System (SMS) Toolkit – (Edition 2 Dec 2014) casa.gov.au/safety-management/safety-management-systems/safety-management-system-resource-kit

ADVISORY CIRCULAR AC 119-01 Safety management systems for air transport operations casa.gov.au/standard-page/casr-part-119-air-operator-certification-management-and-systems

ICAO Safety Management Manual (Document: 9859) 4th Edition 2019 icao.int/APAC/Meetings/2019%20COSCAPSEA%20iSTARS/9859_cons_en.pdf

CAANZ Good Aviation Practice Booklet 'How to be a Safety Manager' (Feb 2020) aviation.govt.nz/assets/publications/gaps/how-to-be-a-safety-manager.pdf

Skybrary website skybrary.aero/index.php/Portal:Safety_Management

Safety Management International Cooperation Group (SMICG) skybrary.aero/index.php/Safety_Management_International_Collaboration_Group_(SM_ICG)