



- ▶ Top 5 Lessons Learned in Safety Management



Background

In the maritime industry, safety management entered into force as a result of too many accidents that involved major losses and that were largely attributed to human errors. People made incorrect assumptions, communicated poorly and couldn't make essential decisions. Vessels sank, burned and collided. By the early 90s the global shipping industry had enough and mandated safety management systems for vessels over 500 gross tons.

Nearly 20 years later, what have we learned?

First of all, we can appreciate that regulating safety management doesn't equate to fewer accidents. Achieving safety in vessel operations involves a continued commitment with frequent internal checks to ensure operations are performed as intended.

Vessel operators with the lowest loss records haven't achieved their success by passing regulatory audits and inspections, they have done so through effective leadership and by providing clear expectations, guidance and support for their personnel onboard and ashore.



Current Events

The continuing NTSB investigation into the *El Faro*¹ sinking presents several pertinent lessons-learned that are worthy of any vessel operator's consideration – regardless of type or size. These lessons are especially pertinent since they reflect issues that SMSLLC has observed with numerous vessel operators since the introduction of the ISM Code.

1 Senior shore-based management must be conversant with an organization's safety management system (SMS) and understand why various requirements exist.

An engaged and committed management team that understands the SMS is essential to achieving success.

2 Commercial considerations cannot circumvent the safety of operations. Personnel who are selling the company's service must be mindful that no opportunity is so urgent or compelling that it cannot be performed safely.

Senior management should make the time to get onboard and reinforce its commitment to safety management with those who get the work done.

3 An SMS must be structured in the simplest possible manner to ensure that it is easily accessible and understood by all personnel within the safety management organization. Further, it should establish controls that are completely applicable and suitable to an organization by taking into account its organizational structure, operations and resources.

SMS documentation should reflect how operations are actually performed by personnel. Written expectations that “sound good” are a liability if personnel are not capable of understanding and ensuring their use on a consistent basis. When expectations do not mirror how tasks are actually performed, change is necessary.

1. The summarizing of NTSB investigation concerns is not intended to preempt actual findings and recommendations at the conclusion of the investigation and neither is it intended to reflect unfavorably on the operator of the *El Faro* or its crew. These lessons-learned are more common than not amongst vessel operators with safety management systems as observed by SMSLLC personnel for many years.



4 Job descriptions must clearly communicate what is expected of each position within the organization. A generic overview of duties is insufficient to ensure that personnel are provided with clear expectations and accountabilities within a safety management system.

5 Objective self-assessment on a frequent basis is essential to identify problems and make appropriate corrections as needed. Self-assessment, including internal audits, should examine how an organization delivers on its intentions as stated within its SMS.

Every position included within your organization that manages, supervises or performs work that may affect onboard safety must be accounted for in the SMS and provided with well-defined responsibilities and authorities in writing.

Checking implementation is essential, but it's also important to determine how effective and suitable requirements of the management system are in light of the organization, its operations and assets.





About SMS

The leading U.S. professional maritime services group is bringing its expertise to the inland and intracoastal marine transportation industry. We understand vessel operations from onboard and ashore perspectives. Management systems have been our primary business since 1996 – we facilitate all phases of development and implementation. SMS HULL delivers a customized TSMS that is configured within Helm CONNECT to align with each client’s unique organizational and operational practices. SMS HULL includes a baseline package of onsite consulting resources to assess, configure and develop a TSMS that may also incorporate AWO Responsible Carrier Program requirements. SMS HULL additionally includes a client-specific TSMS implementation plan and options for enhanced consulting packages.

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