



- ▶ Tips for Building an Effective Safety Management System



What's Effective?

An effective safety management system (SMS) is one that fulfills the following objectives:

- Reinforces shared commitment within an organization to place a high value on achieving safety in vessel operations.
- Ensures that problems and potential problems that may impact safety are reported and considered in order that appropriate action is taken in a timely manner.
- Provides appropriate and supportable standards, policies and administrative controls including procedures and checklists.

If these objectives are essential for an effective SMS, how would you build it?



Tips for Success in 5 Steps

1 Before you start conceptualizing how to develop your SMS, everyone who would be affected by it needs to get onboard. There should be basic training and understanding regarding what's involved with an SMS including the resources and commitment to support it.

There should be general agreement regarding the scope of the SMS including the degree to which it will involve shore-based in addition to onboard responsibilities and operations. Above all, there should be a commitment from the most senior management regarding their support for an SMS that is communicated to everyone who will participate in the system.

At this time, you should appoint a Project Team that includes representation from senior management, operations/technical, safety and onboard leadership. You may also wish to produce a simple project plan that incorporates timelines and responsibilities for the Project Team.

2 Assess your existing controls against the SMS standard that you are choosing to seek conformance with. Whether it's the ISM Code, AWO RCP or simply the TSMS requirements within Subchapter M, you need to account for what you already may have in-house before you start any development effort.

Once completed, your assessment should clearly identify what you believe you may have in-hand versus the gaps that will need to be addressed once you start your development effort. Communicate the results of your assessment to the Project Team.

3 Plan your build. Now you can conceptualize regarding the structure of your SMS and how the Project Team wishes for it to be accessed onboard and ashore. The structure must be simple and focus on the end-users' experience in living with the SMS on a routine basis.



4 Now build it and keep this command in mind. What you put into writing within your SMS must be capable of being done.

- It must be clear.
- It must be concise.
- It must be understandable.
- It must reflect how personnel within your organization get work done - not how you intend that they get work done. The best way to ensure this is to involve personnel who are tasked with

the work to assist with developing related parts of the SMS. The Project Team can be especially helpful to facilitating this during the build phase.

If you write requirements into your SMS that are not reflective of what your personnel understand and are capable of doing, you are creating liabilities that may result in substantial problems for your company in the event of an incident and investigation.

The underlined statement is what is most important as you build your SMS. A great looking manual is pointless if the details amount to a work of fiction. Focus on capturing reality.

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5 Get it out there. Launch your SMS through a combination of training sessions, preparation audits and a good platform to communicate progress company-wide.

You will find that there are issues with your SMS in certain areas once it starts getting tested and used in the field. That's to be expected and underscores the necessity to keep checking your SMS and planning changes as needed over time.



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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