

# A positive safety culture is not achieved by accident

THE HEARTS & MINDS OF SAFETY LEADERSHIP



## BRIEFING

A robust Safety Management System (SMS) is the backbone of any effective safety culture in an airport environment. While safety culture involves the behaviours, attitudes, and values that underpin safe practices, an SMS provides the structure and processes necessary to systematically manage safety risks.

Airports are incredibly complex environments with high volumes of people in the form of employees, passengers, and visitors. In addition, there are intricate airside operations involving numerous organisations that have to work in synchronicity in order to turn around aircraft. These organisations all intersect within the vicinity of the airport infrastructure and will very likely involve people who have never met before or may not even speak the same language. This complexity is dazzling, and the fact that it works as well as it does is amazing. In fact, if you are reading this briefing, this has probably described why you love the aviation industry and are passionate about it.

However, this complexity makes it essential for the airport to have a structured approach to safety and also for it to ensure its structure is aligned with the airlines and other operators who call the airport home.

The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) defines an SMS as having four distinct pillars: Safety Policy, Safety Risk Management, Safety Assurance, and Safety Promotion. Together, these pillars help identify, manage, and mitigate safety risks while promoting continuous improvement in safety outcomes.

## THE FOUR PILLARS OF AN SMS AIRPORT

### 1 SAFETY POLICY

This pillar sets the foundation for safety in an airport. It establishes the organisation's commitment to safety, ensuring that senior leadership is visibly engaged in fostering a safety-first culture.

For an airport, this means not only having a written safety policy but also ensuring that all employees and those who work there are aligned with it. Leaders must visibly champion safety, reinforcing that safety is non-negotiable across all operations.

### 2 SAFETY RISK MANAGEMENT

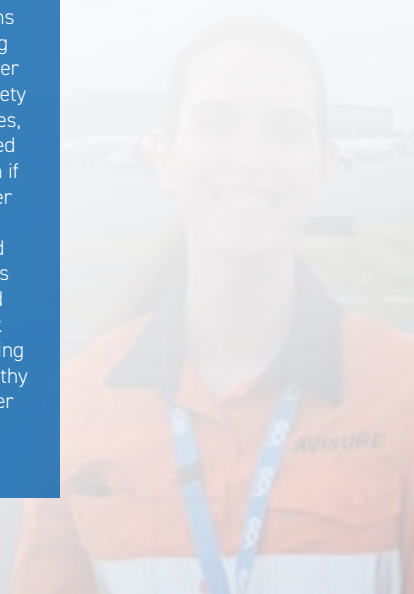
This pillar involves proactively identifying hazards and assessing the associated risks. In an airport setting, this includes risks related to aircraft operations, airside vehicle movements, baggage handling, and even terminal safety for passengers. The airport needs to ensure all operators are aligned in risk mitigation strategies and are single minded in their purpose.

### 3 SAFETY ASSURANCE

After implementing safety measures, this pillar ensures those actions are working effectively. In an airport, this could include regular safety audits, inspections, and monitoring of operations to verify that procedures are being followed and that risk mitigations are working. Continuous monitoring of lead indicator data and behaviours is crucial, especially in high-consequence environments such as airports.

### 4 SAFETY PROMOTION

The final pillar involves cultivating a positive safety culture through education, training, and communication. For airports, this means regularly updating employees and other stakeholders on safety policies, near-misses, and lessons learned from events – even if they are from other locations. Safety promotion should also include stress management and psychosocial risk reduction, recognising that a mentally healthy workforce is a safer workforce.



# CALL TO ACTION

## 1 Commit to a living Safety Policy

Ensure that your airport's safety policy is not just a document but a living, breathing part of daily operations. Everyone should understand and engage with it, from the C-suite to front line employees and other stakeholders.

## 2 Proactively manage safety risks

Encourage your teams to constantly identify and assess risks in day-to-day operations and be energetic with their reporting. Don't wait for incidents to report or address safety concerns—learn to train your eyeballs to see what could go wrong and deal with things proactively.

## 3 Monitor and assure safety processes

Regularly review safety procedures and audit operational areas. Ensure that all mitigations are working as anticipated and make adjustments as needed.

## 4 Promote safety continuously

Use safety briefings, training, and communication to keep safety top-of-mind for all employees and contractors. Reinforce the importance of psychosocial well-being alongside operational safety.

## 5 Emphasise vigilance

Remind teams that vigilance is the price of safety. Regular safety checks, reporting near-misses, and ensuring that everyone feels responsible for safety will help prevent incidents.

# STORYTELLING

## GLOBAL EXAMPLES OF AN SMS THAT HAD TO BECOME HEALTHY

The 2010 Deepwater Horizon disaster was a turning point for BP, leading to one of the largest environmental catastrophes in history. The incident not only highlighted severe gaps in operational safety but also exposed the need for a fundamental overhaul of BP's Safety Management System (SMS). In response, BP restructured its entire approach to safety, focusing on the four key pillars of an SMS to rebuild trust and prevent future disasters.



The four pillars of BP's SMS post the Deepwater Horizon event:

## 1 Policy framework

After Deepwater Horizon, BP's leadership adopted a strong safety-first policy, genuinely prioritising safety as a core value across the organisation. BP made a commitment to leadership engagement, ensuring safety was no longer just a compliance issue but a fundamental business objective. Top executives took ownership of safety policies, ensuring they were embraced at every level across the company irrespective of whether people were employees, contractors or guests on site.

## 2 Risk management

BP implemented a comprehensive risk management approach that placed a strong focus on identifying hazards before they could cause harm. This involved stricter assessments of operational risks in offshore drilling, refining, and logistics. The company used advanced technologies for real-time risk assessments, including updated monitoring systems for oil rigs, and initiated more thorough training to ensure staff could recognise and manage operational risks effectively.

## 3 Assurance programs

To ensure safety procedures were followed, BP enhanced its safety assurance programs. Regular internal and external audits became standard practice to verify compliance with safety protocols. The company also established a global Safety and Operational Risk (S&OR) function, which provided independent oversight and review of safety management practices. These initiatives helped BP track and measure safety performance on an ongoing basis, ensuring any lapses were addressed quickly.

## 4 Safety promotion

BP promoted safety through extensive training and a commitment to fostering a Just Culture, encouraging employees to report near-misses and incidents without fear of reprisal. Leadership reinforced that learning from failures was crucial to improving safety systems. The company also launched multiple safety awareness campaigns to promote a culture of vigilance among its employees and contractors.



## Questions for Team Discussion

1. How can we integrate the four pillars of Safety Management Systems into our airport daily operations more effectively?
2. What are some potential risks that we have not yet addressed through our Safety Risk Management processes?
3. How do we ensure that our safety culture remains proactive and not reactive, ensuring that both operational and psychosocial risks are continually managed?