

Join The Force: Be a Part of the Safety Solution

By Keith Johnson, ALEA Safety Program Manager

For the past several years, a safety management system (SMS) has been in existence to support an international effort to eliminate helicopter accidents by 80 percent in the next 10 years. But to make it happen, ALEA members must become part of the team.

Following the International Helicopter Safety Seminar in Montreal, Canada, in September 2005, three teams were formed. The International Helicopter Safety Team (IHST) first was formed, and this team created two additional teams to develop a program to achieve the objective. The Joint Helicopter Safety Analysis Team (JHSAT) has analyzed 195 accidents from the National Transportation Safety Board dataset for the year 2000 and made seven interim recommendations to the IHST. The Joint Helicopter Safety Implementation Team (JHSIT) has begun preliminary discussions of the recommendations.

ALEA is a member of the JHSIT, and as our representative, I will make every effort to share our progress as the IHST Executive Committee reviews JHSAT and JHSIT recommendations and adopts final proposals. The following information is not intended to represent approval of any recommendations by the IHST.

Plans are currently in progress to have a Safety Symposium at the ALEA Annual Conference in Orlando, FL. Representatives from the various teams have been invited and will discuss the plans and the work to date, followed by comments, questions and answers. This symposium welcomes all attendees to participate, with special emphasis on unit managers and safety officers. Participation in this symposium can help jumpstart your safety program.

A safety management system has been approved by Transport Canada and is in the implementation process. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has addressed SMS, and its efforts can be seen on its website. Additionally, many aviation organizations have adopted SMS, but this has not yet been adopted industry wide.

This article is intended to familiarize our members with the concepts of SMS, not to recommend any specific model. That will be left to the IHST.

What Is SMS?

SMS is a proactive, integrated approach to safety management. SMS is part of an overall management process that an organization chooses to adopt in order to ensure that the goals of the organization can be accomplished. It embraces the principal that the identification and management of risk increases the likelihood of accomplishing a mission. Furthermore, hazards can be identified and dealt with systematically through both an employee hazard identification program and a program of continuing improvement and professionalism. Auditing and monitoring processes for these policies and standards will ensure that aircraft are operated in such a way as to minimize the risks inherent in flight operations. Many law enforcement organizations have already adopted SMS in their organizations and demonstrated that accidents can be eliminated.

Management, Leadership, Commitment and Planning

Organization management must be committed to the safety program that establishes and maintains the SMS. Organization management is required to actively support this process and use it with other efforts to manage the organization. Management must give leadership to the program and demonstrate the commitment to safety and its priority in the achievements of the organization through everyday actions. The processes in place in the management system can include active involvement for all managers and supervisors, who through planning and review, should continue to drive efforts for continuing improvement in safety and safety performance. The phrase "safety management" should be taken to mean safety, health and environmental management. The key focus, however, is the safe operations of airworthy aircraft.

Freedom From Unacceptable Risk of Harm

It is necessary for all managers and supervisors to understand the importance of safety by being fully informed of the objectives, actions, results and consequences of safety management procedures.

They should also be aware that everyone has an individual responsibility for the safety of their own actions, and that managers are accountable for the safety performance of the activities, products, service and procedures in their area of responsibility.

The elements within the organization that are aimed at maintaining and improving safety standards include:

- Flight operations
- Maintenance
- Safety
- Training

By organizing these elements into one system, an organization can create a structure to manage and monitor safety activities and results.

The safety unit must provide policies and procedures, while regularly monitoring and reviewing the activities of the organization in a coordinated overall picture of safety standards.

Safety Documentation

- Documentation that supports the three systems referred to above includes the following:
 - operations manual
 - safety management system manual
 - operations orders
 - maintenance orders
 - safety notices
 - NOTAMs (Operations & Maintenance)
 - operations & maintenance notices
 - organization newsletters

Document control should be described in manuals. The safety unit should have responsibility for documenting and control of emergency response procedures, safety management systems, fuel handling and storage procedures.

Safety Management System Relationship

The safety unit is responsible for carrying out audits. There must be a healthy, integrated, working relationship among the various elements of the organization so that they remain complementary in nature.

Because of its importance in ensuring the safety of operations, the safety unit operates independently of other elements of the organization and reports directly to the unit manager (commanding officer or officer-in-charge).

The organization for the SMS is based in part on several sets of governmental regulations: the FAA System Safety guidance, Global Aviation Information Network standards, the Occupational Health and Safety Administration standards and the Environmental Protection Agency's regulatory requirements.

This system relies on the following:

1. Goal setting, policy, organization, planning, monitoring, auditing and review processes.
2. A risk assessment of all hazards.
3. A thorough investigation of all accidents and incidents.
4. Regular health, safety and environmental performance reports from all operations to corporate headquarters.
5. Regular local safety meetings with minutes forwarded to operations headquarters. Identification of health, safety and environmental training needs with a standard program to address these requirements.
6. Internal audit program.

The day-to-day management, overall planning and implementation of the SMS is the responsibility of the safety officer, who is responsible to the commanding officer. The safety officer should meet regularly with the unit management, which regularly reviews overall safety performance. Safety officers should conduct facility audits. The safety unit should be available as necessary to assist managers and supervisors in maintaining the best working practices.

NOTE: For additional information on standards, refer to the Airborne Law Enforcement Association Standards that are posted on the ALEA website at, www.alea.org.

Structure of the SMS

The structure of the SMS should be graphically displayed so every member of the organization understands how each element works with one another. The organization's manual should detail the means of managing safety in the organization and how that is to be achieved.

Implementing SMS

Implementing SMS requires leadership, planning, training, monitoring, recognition and patience. The SMS must be flexible enough to adapt to the uniqueness of each organization and the mission(s) it performs. Implementation is an inclusive, evolving process that must engage every member of the organization in the effort to eliminate accidents. Many law enforcement aviation organizations have already demonstrated that a healthy SMS can eliminate accidents if you make safety first. In order to create an optimum SMS model, input and feedback from our members is essential. Please send questions and comments to the editors of Air Beat or safety@alea.org, as we move forward with developing a plan to eliminate accidents.