

Safety management systems

By Bruce Loughner

Before you begin

Study your organization's safety practices. Find out if your organization has a documented safety management system (SMS) in place. If you do not have a SMS, the following points can help you get started.



Introduction

A SMS is an integrated, documented process that outlines how an organization intends to develop and meet its safety objectives. A SMS should capture the full breadth of your safety efforts. However, it does not contain the details for implementing each safety objective. Instead, supporting documents and programs, many of which may already exist in your organization maintain those details.

The value of a SMS is that it provides:

- A comprehensive view of the safety effort;
- A linkage among different essential elements;
- A means of keeping the organization on track and moving in the same direction;
- A consistent method of managing and improving the safety efforts.

Your SMS is a map for achieving safety excellence. It must be a journey you and your organization are willing to take and are capable of making. You should tailor a SMS to meet your organization's specific needs. Merely adopting someone else's system invites a poor fit.

Discussion

Gather a group to discuss the creation of a SMS for your organization. First, there must be a consensus decision that a SMS is appropriate. For a SMS to be effective, your organization must be willing to bring all safety efforts under one umbrella and use it to drive safety improvements. One of the primary benefits of a documented system is that it keeps everyone moving in the same direction. If the consensus has not yet developed, a system approach will not be effective.

Second, the self-assessment process should be well under way for a clear picture of where the organization wants to go. The SMS provides the documented framework of your efforts. However, the vision of your destination comes from the self-assessment process. Only when this is clear are you ready to create a SMS.

Next, you should examine existing policies and programs to determine where they fit within the organization's essential elements. Use the self-assessment to identify missing or weak policies, procedures and programs that need reinforcement or development.

Finally, install a departmental and organizational discipline to use the SMS once you complete it. You can achieve this by implementing an accountability system that starts at the top management level and continues down to the supervisor level. Be sure this commitment and leadership is in place before you begin.

Group activity

Have the group consider and discuss the items below needed for developing and implementing a SMS.

1. Determine the makeup of a multidisciplinary team with experience in operations, engineering, administration, and safety and health.
2. Develop plans to design and implement program elements that have been identified as weaknesses or gaps.
3. Identify measures to track progress toward total implementation.
4. Determine how to conduct periodic reassessments of the SMS to identify opportunities for improved performance.
5. Identify action steps for achieving a functional SMS.

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