

What's Going On!

Richard Carlson – SSF Chairman

Modern aviation Safety Management Systems (SMS), such as those used by commercial airlines and today's military, have evolved over decades using knowledge and experience gained in accident investigations and human factors research. These changes have led to what can best be described as aviation safety based on per-incident prediction and prevention. That is, instead of waiting for an incident or accident to happen, pilots, passengers, and ground crew actively look for, and document, situations that are precursors to incident or accident. This data is then analyzed, trends are identified, and remediation procedures put in place before something bad happens.

These SMS's are based on 2 precepts. 1) reports are anonymous and 2) changes are evaluated to ensure effectiveness.

Anonymous reporting is essential as the goal is to capture data, not place blame. Not only will the individual making the report remain anonymous, but any individual, aircraft, or equipment should also remain anonymous. Reports should describe the situation, without drawing conclusions or making judgments. There should also be a mechanism where an individual may safely self-report an event or issue without fear of blame or ridicule.

An important feature of this SMS is the active participation of everyone involved. Everyone must actively look for these precursor events and document them. Look for them when you help your friends move the gliders from the hanger or tie-down to the flight line. Are gliders being moved too quickly or without the proper coordination between multiple gliders? Look for them at the flight line. Are pilots engaging in non-flight related conversations with, or near, pilots preparing for launch? Are the operations standard launch procedures being followed or are pilots making up their own? Are launches being rushed or coming to a stop after landing more for convenience than safety? These are just some of the precursor events that could indicate either pilot or organizational issues that need to be examined.

Experience has shown that these precursor events are happening more often than we expect. Actively looking for them will bring them to light. As a starting point it is recommended that at least 1 precursor event be identified every flying day. The key here is that written reports, preferably electronic, be collected to guide the analysis activity. Relying on verbal reports will mean data will be lost making the analysis less effective.

Once some data has been collected, it needs to be analyzed. The goal here is to identify organizational or operational changes that need to be made. This could mean a new operational rule or procedure needs to be instituted. It could mean that existing rules or procedures need to be changed. It could also mean that organizational changes are required to resolve this issue. Whatever the outcome, the new or revised rule/procedure needs to be evaluated to determine how effective it is in responding to the precursor events. Continuing to capture these precursor events is a good check on this response. Finally, training needs to occur to ensure that everyone is aware of the problem and the solution.

At no time should any attempt be made to publicly identify who the individuals are nor assign blame to an individual. Doing so will tend to discourage individuals from making reports. By demonstrating that reports remain anonymous, you encourage everyone to actively look for these precursor events.

What kinds of data should you be looking to collect? Anything that has the potential to be a safety threat that could damage aircraft or facilities, or injure pilots, passengers, or visitors. Some examples include:

- Canopies left open when the glider is unattended
- Unattended glider parked with the tail dolly still attached
- Gliders parked in front of the launch line
- Gliders being improperly towed to/from the launch area
- Pilots being interrupted while conducting their pre-launch checklist
- Visitors or passengers near the flight line without a proper escort

To make this work and ensure that you get at least 1 report every flying day the SSF recommends that you assign someone to ensure that reports are made. Most clubs and commercial operations have someone on the field who is responsible for that days operation. Until the organization has made this activity a normal part of its safety culture, that individual should be tasked with making sure at least 1 precursor event is recorded each flying day. The SSF recognize that this is a big ask, but it is essential if reports will be generated and captured.

At the present time the SSF expect that each club, chapter, and commercial operator will implement their own recording system. That may be an internal form on their web site, a google form, or any other mechanism that works for them. There also needs to be someone assigned to collate the data and perform the analysis tasks. The SSF would consider establishing a form on our web site if there is interest from the community.

By taking advantage of the knowledge and experience of your organizations members, you too can implement a modern Safety Management System. One that makes it easier to find and correct potential safety threats before they cause accidents and injuries. It also keeps Soaring FUN!