

# SMS – Advice from Heli Operators

The first two helicopter operators to become SMS-certificated give their top tips for implementing SMS in any operation.

**T**aranaki-based Ice Aviation, and Rotor Force in the Hawkes Bay are two 'early adopters' of a Safety Management System. Both 'Group 2' organisations\*, they are the first two helicopter operations to become SMS-certificated.

Here, Jim Finlayson from Ice Aviation, and Tracey Campbell, the SMS Manager for Rotor Force, give their top tips for SMS certification success.

## It's Not That Hard

**Tracey:** It really isn't that difficult, particularly if you already have a good QA system. Don't reinvent the wheel. Use what you already have, just upgrade it to match what's needed.

**Jim:** Don't be daunted. It's not that onerous. Break it down into little segments, review what you already have and then look at what you need to add.

## Where to Start

**Tracey:** Do the gap analysis first. That will identify what you already have, and what you need to meet the new requirements. Focus first on your critical operational risks, the high consequence events.

**Jim:** Most companies with a robust QA system will already be identifying hazards and managing risk and conducting safety investigations. Assess that first. You could find that all that needs to happen is for it to be properly written down. In today's world, you need to have something concrete for the auditor to assess.

## Staff

**Tracey:** One person cannot do this alone. Joe Faram (CEO of Rotor Force) called all his contract pilots in for a day to explain what SMS was about and how they would be involved.

The system is only as good as the organisation's safety leadership and culture. Joe is really proactive in this area. His contractors respect him and if he believes in it, and walks the talk, they will too.

It would be a waste of time if somebody in leadership treats it as a box tick.

**Jim:** I have only one staff member – me. That made composing the implementation plan more difficult. I had to tailor guidance, obviously aimed at larger organisations, to my tiny business. That was the biggest challenge for me.

## Now What?

**Tracey:** We'll be continually reassessing and improving Rotor Force's SMS, establishing and reviewing key safety performance indicators, making changes where required, and identifying trends by looking for reoccurring types of events, common causes or risks.

**Jim:** You have to keep at it. SMS is not about 'the manual'. It's not about certification. It's about on the ground, day-to-day, ongoing safety measures. There's only me in my operation, but to get a fresh eye, I have a safety manager who's a very experienced helicopter pilot and who has a background in safety management. My flight examiner is the safety manager for another heli company. So both are very focused on safety and neither is hesitant to tell me when they think I need to do something differently.

*"Focus first on your critical operational risks, the high consequence events."*

## Where to Get Help

**Tracey:** Joe brought me in to prepare an implementation plan because I have a background in system creation and management, as well as in workplace health and safety.

If you can't do it yourself, get someone in to do it for you. Ask other operators who they got in, what that person's background is and their experience, and what the operator thought of the implementation plan.

**Jim:** I was convalescing after a shoulder operation so could put the time into the implementation plan, myself. It took me about two weeks, full time.

But if you can't do it yourself, and you can't afford anyone else to do it, you can ask me, or people like me, for low cost – or, depending on the circumstances, even no cost – mentoring. I already have three participant operators that I'm advising. And Aviation New Zealand has put a call out to SMS-certificated operators to do something similar.

\* To find out more about your obligations as a Group 2 organisation, go to [www.caa.govt.nz/sms](http://www.caa.govt.nz/sms).



Photo courtesy of Rotor Force.

## Special Tip

**Tracey:** If you're not sure what's required, my suggestion would be for someone from your organisation to go to a CAA workshop. I have a background in putting systems together but I still found the workshop useful. And it's free!

**Jim:** After I'd drafted the plan, I tested one part out, to make sure it was useful. Your emergency response plan for instance: a little desktop exercise might uncover that in reality, it wouldn't work, or wouldn't be useful. It will also show the auditors when they come to assess you at the beginning that you know for sure the system you have designed does work.

## Final Words

**Adrian Duncan (CAA Team Leader Airworthiness, Helicopter and Agricultural):** The SMS certification of Rotor Force was relatively straightforward, because management had taken responsibility for the development of SMS from the start. They had also tailored the system to fit the size of their organisation and the specific nature of the activities it undertakes.

**Joe Faram:** Embrace SMS, don't resist it. View your safety management system as a tool to improve not just the safety, but the quality and control of your business. It will create efficiency, effectiveness, and profitability. With SMS you'll be constantly in tune with your business and that of your clients. ■

## Summary

- » Don't be daunted.
- » Don't reinvent the wheel.
- » Do the gap analysis first.
- » The system is only as good as the organisation's safety leadership and culture.
- » SMS is about on the ground, day-to-day, ongoing safety measures. It's not about 'the manual'.
- » If you can't do it yourself, get someone (who knows what they're doing) to do it for you. Or contact Aviation New Zealand for SMS-certificated operators willing to mentor.
- » Go to a CAA workshop, even if you think you know what to do.
- » Test one part of your plan to see if, in reality, it works.
- » Embrace SMS. It will improve not just the safety, but the quality and control of your business, its efficiency, effectiveness and profitability.