

TOP OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS TO ASSESS SAFETY CULTURE OF THE INSURED

AIA SAFETY COMMITTEE

STEVE BRUNEAU, VP AVIATION SERVICES, POLARIS AERO;
ANDREW KARAS, IS-BAO PROGRAMME DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS AVIATION COUNCIL (IBAC);
AND JASON STARKE, DIRECTOR OF SAFETY, BALDWIN SAFETY & COMPLIANCE

It's policy renewal time and you meet with your customer. You need to update your understanding of an operator's safety program so you can get a sense of their risk to your company. The challenge with quantifying safety in our industry is the lack of catastrophic outcomes. The absence of incidents or accidents — while generally used to indicate a company's safety performance — is a woefully inadequate method of gauging safety in operations.

How can we determine an operator's level of safety? While this article doesn't aim to be the litmus test to judge the effectiveness of an operator's safety program, the recommended questions provide a way to triage the operator and formulate a picture of the subsequent risk profile to insure. For clients that appear safe from these questions, they can go a step further and show formal certifications to various standards. Additionally, examples of their SMS in action (with or without a SMS computer application) should backup the answers. Before you review the recommended questions, it's important that you keep the framework of a safety management system in mind (Summarized from ICAO):

Policy: Company Leadership establishes policy guiding safety management activities in the organization to include employee accountability regarding safety, risk tolerability and acceptance; safety reporting; and establishing objectives.

Risk Management: During planning of work tasks or operational changes, the company manages risks associated with identified hazards.

Assurance: The company uses data from measurements and observations to evaluate risk control performance, progress towards establish objectives, the presence of emerging hazards, and managing change.

Promotion: Company Leadership promotes safety and engagement through the communication of safety performance and potential threats to operations. Promotion efforts also include the provision of training to facilitate SMS participation and increase competence in operational safety.

When asking the recommended questions outlined herein, listen intently to understand the layered level of insight that you can gather about their culture, leadership, procedures, and coverage of the components that comprise the SMS framework.

When talking to:

ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP	YOU WANT TO HEAR THIS TYPE OF ANSWER
How does your department audit safety performance and efficiency?	We conduct scheduled assessments at defined intervals to ensure compliance with regulations, standards, and company policy.
Do you have a designated Safety Manager?	The organization is staffed with qualified personnel to address safety concerns. A designated Safety Manager ensures accountability and oversight of hazards and risks.
Does your flight department have an organizational structure that lists the qualifications required for each position?	Presents an organizational chart identifying positions, roles and responsibilities that reflect scope of operation (i.e., Dept Manager, Mx Manager, Ops Manager, Chief Pilot, etc.). If a small operation, delegation to third party organizations or outsourcing.
Describe your organization's flight crew, ground, maintenance, and flight training programs.	Presents a documented training program illustrating initial and recurrent training intervals with established contracts with training providers.
EMPLOYEES THROUGHOUT THE OPERATION	
Is leadership engaged with safety management?	Confirmation that leaders are present for safety meetings or standdowns, visibly present and engaging, talking about safety and encouraging safety behavior.
Has leadership established clear safety objectives that improve safety?	Articulation of the SPI's and confirmation they are visible and communicated to everyone throughout the year.
Is leadership committed to organization safety operating procedures despite potential inconvenience or loss of revenue?	Rules are never bent to meet a mission objective and, for Part 91 operations, the degree to which operational controls are waived is minimal.
Does the organization engage in periodic culture surveys for improvement?	Organization does an annual survey, shares results, and addresses issues in timely manner.
Has there been much employee turnover in the past year?	Nothing out of the ordinary or the result of safety mishaps.

When talking to:

FLIGHT CREWS	YOU WANT TO HEAR THIS TYPE OF ANSWER
Do you accomplish cabin emergency training?	Description of the most recent training and the frequency of training.
Do you perform a meaningful risk assessment before each flight? Has that ever resulted in mitigating risks before the flight?	Articulation of how it's done, how it's used preflight, and feeling that it is the right level of risk control toward ensuring a safe flight.
MAINTENANCE MANAGER	
Can you describe your aircraft maintenance control system, e.g., how do you ensure you will comply with State of Registry regulations or equipment requirements for certain airspace?	Documented process of how they perform, document, record and manage maintenance of their aircraft. If there's no internal process due to outsourced maintenance, documentation of oversight is in company manuals.
Are maintenance personnel authorized to remove an aircraft from operation because of non-compliance or threat of safety to aircraft, persons or property?	Appropriately qualified personnel have the ability to remove an aircraft from service due to non-compliance or threat of safety with impunity. (Noted in Operations Manual)

In closing, it's important when asking these questions to also evaluate whether the operator simply knows the answer or is actually performing the answer on a daily basis. Having a safety solution in place is useless if it's not being used.

Safety is a good thing for everyone involved in our ecosystem, from the passengers and employees to the operator's bottom line and a lower risk profile for the insurance industry.

SAFETY NEWS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

- The 5G problem in the US (<https://www.faa.gov/5g>)
- Latest update on the FAA SMS Mandate (Submission for public comment due out Fall of 2022)
- NBAA Launches new Safety Manager Training Certificate program (<https://nbaa.org/professional-development/safety-manager-certificate-program>)
- ISBAO publishes new updates to Safety Standards (<https://nbaa.org/flight-department-administration/sms/is-bao>)
- NATA launches Safety 1st Verify (<https://www.nata.aero/education-and-training/safety-1st-verify>)