

# RISK ASSESSMENTS

## Frequently Asked Questions



Naval Safety Command

March 2025



### **BLUF**

The Navy Safety Management System (SMS) is a system of systems for risk management and assessing the effectiveness of risk controls, and requires each level of command to consistently evaluate its own internal processes; to self-assess, self-correct and adjust accordingly, and to consistently communicate risk issues to the appropriate level of command. The Navy SMS outlines three assessment levels: Level 1: Self-Assessment, Level 2: Senior to Junior Assessment, and Level 3: External/Third-Party Assessment performed by NAVSAFECOM and its assessment partners: Naval Audit Service (NAVAUDSVC), Naval Inspector General (NAVIG), Naval Reactors (NR), Commander, Carrier Strike Groups Four and Fifteen (CSG 4, 15), Board of Inspection and Survey (INSURV), and other assessment partners as applicable.

### **BACKGROUND**

The Navy Safety and Occupational Health Manual, OPNAV-M 5100.23 Section A, sets forth the framework and requirements for instituting an SMS or Safety Management Plan (SMP) for Echelon II/III organizations and their subordinate commands.

# ASSESSMENT FAQs

## Naval Safety Command Third Party Assurance and Risk Assessment Overview

**Purpose:** Inform and educate Navy and Marine Corps Level 3 Assessments via general FAQ. Includes Tier-specific FAQs. This information can be pulled and tailored for use in other media products developed for specific audiences such as ECH IV and below leadership or supervisors, all unit personnel, etc.

**AUDIENCE:** Primary audience is command/unit leadership for all echelon levels.

### References:

[Navy Safety and Occupational Health Manual, OPNAV-M 5100.23 SECTION A](#) (18 JUN 2024)

[3058.1A - ASSESSMENT STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES 09 SEP 2024.PDF](#)

[Designing an Effective Safety Management System \(SMS\)](#), Prof. Nancy Leveson, MIT, 2020

**Background:** The Navy Safety and Occupational Health Manual, OPNAV-M 5100.23, sets forth the framework and requirements for instituting a Safety Management System (SMS) or Safety Management Plan (SMP) for Echelon II/III organizations and their subordinate commands.

As a system of systems for risk management and a tool used for assessing the effectiveness of risk controls, the Navy's SMS requires each level of command to constantly evaluate its own internal processes; to self-assess, self-correct and adjust accordingly, and to communicate risk issues to the appropriate level of command.

According to Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Professor Nancy Leveson, "The goal of an SMS should be to proactively control safety in every aspect of the organization. For organizations that produce products, the SMS manages [risk and] safety in the product development process and in the product itself. For service industries, safety must be designed into and managed in the workplace and the services provided." For the Navy, our product is warfighting readiness.

Under the Navy SMS, there are three assessment levels: Level 1: Self-Assessment, Level 2: Senior-to-Junior Assessment, and Level 3: External/Third-Party Assessments performed by NAVSAFECOM and its assessment partners: Naval Audit Service (NAVAUDSVC), Naval Inspector General (NAVIG), Naval Reactors (NR), Commander, Carrier Strike Group Four and Fifteen (CSG 4, 15), Board of Inspection and Survey (INSURV), and other assessment partners as applicable.

## I. NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND RISK ASSESSMENTS- General FAQ

### Q1. What risk assessments are required under the Navy SMS?

**A1.** The Navy SMS requires commands to engage in three assessment levels:

- Level 1: Self-Assessment: Commands required to evaluate themselves and ask how well they identify risks from an internal standpoint.
- Level 2: Senior-to-Junior Assessment: Evaluates how well subordinates (personnel and commands/units) assess themselves, and identify, manage, and communicate risk. These findings should be rolled into the higher headquarter command's self-assessment.
- Level 3: External/Third-Party Assessment: Performed by NAVSAFECOM and assessment partners, these assessments serve as an impartial, third-party check on the risk control systems for commands and units.

Through its three-tier assessment process, NAVSAFECOM conducts assessments to gauge the health of risk controls across the Navy and Marine Corps, enforces compliance, and evaluates whether lessons learned have

## ASSESSMENT FAQs

been implemented as a part of day-to-day operations.

### **Q2. What assessments does NAVSAFECOM conduct?**

**A2.** NAVSAFECOM conducts three types of assessments:

- Tier I assurance assessments, which evaluate Echelon II/III organizations.
- Tier II assessments, which look at inspection and certification teams.
- Tier III assessments which focus on ECH IV and below units and commands by geographical area (commonly referred to as local area assessments).

### **Q3. Why does the Naval Safety Command perform assessments?**

**A3.** To effectively manage risk and make sound decisions, commands must have an effective risk control system to identify, communicate and account for issues and conditions that increase risk to the organization's mission and operations. A healthy risk control system (implemented in the form of an SMS or SMP) requires continuous and proactive self-awareness, self-assessment, self-correction, and learning. It also requires that risk be acknowledged and accounted for at the appropriate level.

NAVSAFECOM's assessment program helps commands improve their self-assessment processes, including how they identify, communicate and account for risk. A key function of sound risk management is the ability to identify the appropriate remedy or corrective action(s) for the risk, whether the risk is mitigated locally within the organization, or communicated to a higher echelon.

Effective risk management is a responsibility borne by every Sailor, Marine and civilian. Safe operations require a continual investment in training; as well as the development of a learning mindset that clearly assigns responsibility and demands accountability enabling risk-informed decision making. We must think, act, and operate differently today so that the leaders of tomorrow have the players, the concepts, and the capabilities they need to fight and win.

### **Q4. What is the Naval Safety Command looking for?**

**A4.** The CNO has charged NAVSAFECOM with the task of evaluating the health and effectiveness of the Navy's risk management processes, in addition to its risk control systems and policies at every level of the organization. The overall focus of NAVSAFECOM assessments evaluate effective risk identification, risk communication and risk accountability.

A command's overall risk picture is a result of the health, quality and effectiveness of its people, policies, and environment (physical and cultural). NAVSAFECOM assessment teams review and evaluate command risk control systems and how effective they are at self-assessment.

"There are several components of the organization that are most important to managing safety: the culture, the safety management (control) structure, and the safety information system. These three components cannot be considered in isolation, though." (Leveson, 2020)

Part of effective risk identification and management is identifying the appropriate remedy or corrective action(s) for the issue (risk), whether the action can be performed locally within the organization, and if not, who has the authority and capability to adequately address the issue. As such, NAVSAFECOM assesses commands and their ability to identify risk factors, communicate awareness of identified factors, and enable targeted risk mitigations and corrective actions by leadership.

### **Q5. How do Third Party assessments help enable and maintain readiness?**

**A5.** Effective risk management requires that risks be effectively communicated to leadership, who can

## ASSESSMENT FAQs

then take action to address the findings and ensure their local assurance activities are more effective. NAVSAFECOM assessments look at commands and units from a third-party/external perspective. Through informed and impartial observation, structured interviews, and comprehensive policy and process reviews, NAVSAFECOM assessment teams can identify, inform, and educate the assessed command on conditions, practices and procedures that are imposing risks to the command's mission or operational readiness.

The results and insights gathered from these assessments are then communicated up the chain of command to the Chief of Naval Operations and Vice Chief of Naval Operations to ensure complete hierarchical transparency.

## II. TIER-SPECIFIC

### Naval Safety Command Tier I, Echelon II and III Assurance Assessments

#### Q1. What are Tier I Assurance Assessments?

**A1.** NAVSAFECOM Tier I assurance assessments provide the following function:

- Evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of the Navy's ECH I safety management and risk control policy (the Navy SMS) by ECH II and III commands
- Ensure ECH II/III commands are aligned with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Secretary of the Navy, Chief of Naval Operations and Commandant of the Marine Corps directives, instructions, policies and orders
- Ensure ECH II/III personnel are effectively executing their risk control systems – SMS/SMP

#### Q2. Why does the Naval Safety Command perform ECH II/III assurance assessments?

**A2.** The intent of each assurance visit is to provide a holistic assessment of the organization's safety management and risk control systems and processes.

By conducting a third-party assessment, NAVSAFECOM helps organizations become more risk-aware and better positioned to enact processes and behaviors that enhance their overall ability to identify, communicate, mitigate and account for risks at the appropriate level.

"The overall goal is to design a control structure that eliminates or reduces losses. Satisfying this goal requires a clear definition of expectations, responsibilities, authority and accountability for safety tasks at all levels of the control structure. In addition, to operate effectively, the structure requires appropriate feedback and coordination between entities. It should also involve leading indicators to signal when the controls are becoming ineffective because of internal or external changes. Together, the entire control structure must enforce the risk controls on system behavior through physical design, defined processes and procedures [as well as], social interaction and culture." (Leveson, 2020)

Commanders must require subordinate leaders to provide prompt and accurate information on the status and effectiveness of their operational units and commands, which includes communicating the true impact of current manning, resources, materiel, and asset conditions on mission readiness. Commanders have a need and obligation to know exactly how mission-capable their subordinate units are. If a subordinate unit is not following or in compliance with any procedure or policy, their immediate superior in command (ISIC)/Type Command (TYCOM) needs to be aware of the issue and needs to know why.

Everyone has a duty and responsibility to communicate risk up and down the chain of command, but echelon commanders are ultimately accountable and responsible for ensuring Safe-to-Operate conditions across the



## ASSESSMENT FAQs

4Ps (Safe Place, Safe People, Safe Property/Materiel, and Safe Processes/Procedures) within each of their subordinate commands, and that their activities are operating safely. ECH II/III commanders ultimately own the risk.

### **Q3. What are Naval Safety Command assessors looking for when they perform Tier I assurance assessments?**

**A3.** Tier I assessments are process-based observations of how ECH II/III commands conduct their day-to-day business to include:

- How commands identify, register, and communicate risk – internally and externally
- How commands use risk management and risk controls in the planning and execution of their mission
- Command risk management culture and behaviors
- Report, Analyze, Get Better processes (Organizational Learning) – Continuous Learning
- Use of Key Risk Indicators and Key Performance Indicators
- Risk registry and risk tracking

NAVSAFECOM assessors also look to identify undue risks resulting from factors beyond the control of the chain of command to adequately address and advocate for problem resolution through both the assessed command's and NAVSAFECOM's chain of command.

### **Q4. How are ECH II/III commands notified of an upcoming NAVSAFECOM Tier I assurance assessment?**

**A4.** Each fiscal year, NAVSAFECOM transmits a naval message listing upcoming assessments and the dates for each risk assurance assessment for the year.

Commands receive a notification via a Precepts Letter with additional coordination requirements of the assessment eight weeks prior to the start of the assessment via email. The notification is sent by the NAVSAFECOM Risk Assurance Assessment Team Leader to the command's Chief of Staff (COS) or equivalent.

The Commander and Senior Enlisted Leader receive Questions for the Record (QFTR) approximately four weeks prior to the start of the assessment. The QFTRs are intended to identify key risk areas or issues impacting the command in an effort to enhance the overall understanding of the command's risk posture prior to the assessment team's arrival.

### **Q5. Who gets a copy of the final assessment report and why?**

**A5.** Assessment reports are sent to the ECH II or ECH III Commander's chain of command within approximately 30 days of the assessment. Copies are also provided to the assessed command's Deputy Commander (DCOM), Executive Director (ED), COS, and Fleet/Force/Command Master Chief/Sergeant Major of the reporting ECH II.

Reports are sent to the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO)/Commandant of the Marine Corps and Vice CNO (VCNO)/Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps (ACMC) three days after they are sent to the ECH II Commander.

Ensuring the person who owns the issue, i.e., individual who can fund or fix it, is aware, and understands the impacts of, the issue is fundamental to effective risk management. This goes back to making sure the person with the authority to fund or fix an issue, i.e., the Accountable Person (AP) is aware of the risk issues for which they are responsible, so the risk issues are effectively evaluated and mitigated.

ECH II and III reports ensure top naval leadership receive a holistic picture of the risk carried throughout the naval enterprise. The reports also help ECH II and III Commanders identify areas of improvement within their risk control systems enabling them to act on risk issues within their span of control and elevate those outside their control to the next level of leadership.

## **ASSESSMENT FAQs** //

### **Q6. What response is required by the assessed command once they receive a copy of the final assessment report?**

**A6.** Within 30 days of submission of the assessment report to the respective ISIC, the assessed command is responsible for submitting a response report addressing the risks that were not previously identified by the command, risks that had been not communicated to the appropriate Accountable Person, or risks without an Accountable Person assigned. This is required to ensure the assessed Commander is articulating to their ISIC the impacts of the risk(s) to operations or mission readiness, plans to mitigate the risk(s), and any assistance required. While these are the minimum requirements for the response report, the assessed Commander may add or address other concerns deemed necessary.

## **Naval Safety Command Tier II – Certification and Inspection Team Standardization Assessments**

### **Q1. What is the purpose of Naval Safety Command Certification and Inspection Team Standardization Assessments?**

**A1.** Tier II assessments are performed by NAVSAFECOM subject matter experts from NAVSAFECOM's warfighting community directorates and evaluate the effectiveness of a chain of command's SMS/SMP management through the observation of assessment and certification events. These assessments look at process and policy standards to evaluate standardization and the level of variance between different commands in execution of shared Optimized Fleet Response Plan (OFRP), Global Maritime Response Plan (GMRP) and policy-directed senior-to-junior assessments.

Tier II assessment teams evaluate second party, senior-to-junior inspection and certifications, such as a strike group commander's - training, inspection, and certification process of an aircraft carrier strike group, or a damage control certification event performed by Afloat Training Group (ATG) on a destroyer.

The focus of these assessments is on standardization, incorporation of an SMS/SMP as well as policies with the goal of ensuring the naval enterprise operates safely by identifying, communicating, and accounting for risk at the appropriate level.

### **Q2. How are Tier II assessments performed?**

**A2.** Tier II assessment teams consist of relevant warfare subject matter experts for the areas assessed. NAVSAFECOM assessors collect data on command policy, procedures and processes, and may engage informally with a limited number of personnel during evolutions. While assessors will not participate in or interfere with evolutions, if any event is observed to be unsafe, the assessor(s) have the authority to stop the evolution and provide immediate remediation.

### **Q3. Who receives the final assessment report and when?**

**A3.** NAVSAFECOM assessors will release the report within 30 days of the assessment. The final report is sent to the owning ECH II command with ECH III and below copied.

### **Q4. What response is required by the assessed command once they receive a copy of the final assessment report?**

**A4.** No response is required for these assessments. The information and results are for the chain of command to use internally to work issues and trends.

# ASSESSMENT FAQs

## Naval Safety Command Tier III, Local Area Assessments – ECH IV and below

### Q1. What do Tier III risk assessments evaluate?

**A1.** Tier III assessments are formal, independent assessments to evaluate compliance and performance of safety and risk management processes across the fleet enterprise and to identify potential systemic issues that reach beyond a singular unit.

The purpose of the assessment is to collect compliance behavior data and observe a unit's day-to-day standards to provide trend data potentially indicative of systemic issues, which need to be further analyzed and addressed by the appropriate accountable person at higher-echelon commands.

Tier III assessments, commonly referred to as Local Area Assessments (LAAs), evaluate the effectiveness of the naval enterprise's SMS and risk management by observing routine operations at the ECH IV and below unit-level to discern latent organizational factors that may contribute to reduced fleet performance.

By observing routine, unit-level operations, NAVSAFECOM assessors gain a better sense of how well risk management processes required under the Navy SMS are understood and implemented. LAAs are a check on the oversight, self-assessment, risk identification, tracking, and communication actions required of all naval ECH II and III commands. This is a direct measure of the gap between work imagined and work executed or performed.

### Q2. How are commands and units notified of an upcoming LAA?

**A2.** NAVSAFECOM releases an ALSAFE for one or more geographic areas roughly one week prior to the planned assessments. Any unit within a listed geographic area is subject to a short notice visit. NAVSAFECOM LAA ALSAFEs are available on the NAVSAFECOM public website at ALSAFE Messages and pushed out via the Announcements section on the NAVSAFECOM mobile app. Learn more and download the app at <https://navalsafetycommand.navy.mil/Resources/NAVSAFECOM-Mobile-App/>

### Q3. Why are the LAAs performed on short notice?

**A3.** NAVSAFECOM has the authority to perform unannounced and short notice assessments and as such, LAA teams arrive at units and look for a variety of evolutions and operations to observe. To capture the true risk picture assessors must be able to observe commands and personnel as they are and where they are. The purpose of these assessments is to see and understand how units are performing their routine and daily operations without those units prepping for an assessment.

The Navy SMS provides the framework for each unit and command at every level to develop its own system of controlling risk - tailored to that unit's mission requirements, but compliant with the risk control system requirements set by its echelon commander.

By evaluating the effectiveness of the unit risk control system, including its self-assessment of that system, NAVSAFECOM can evaluate the effectiveness of the next higher echelon's risk control system.

### Q4. What are NAVSAFECOM assessors looking for during LAAs?

**A4.** Assessors are looking at how units and commands manage their risk control systems to include compliance with higher echelon requirements.

During an LAA, the assessment teams are looking to capture data on organizational factors such as external and internal policy adherence; implementation of continuous improvement processes; program ownership, administration, and execution; watch standing and scheduling; fatigue management; procedural compliance; and level of knowledge.

## ASSESSMENT FAQs ////////////////////////////////////

While discrepancies are documented, the assessors are also focused on capturing the “why” behind the discrepancy and want to understand what factors led or contributed to a particular discrepancy or issue of non-compliance. Unit interaction with the assessment teams greatly enhances the ability for NAVSAFECOM to assist the assessed units.

Assessors conduct informal interviews with a representative sample of unit personnel to assess how risk management is conducted by looking at common evolutions that regularly occur within the units to observe and evaluate procedural compliance based on command behaviors and day-to-day standards.

If an evolution is identified as noncompliant with an instruction or policy, the assessor may engage with and ask follow-on questions to the individual (and supervisor as required) to assist in providing basic context surrounding the noncompliance. Assessors do have the authority to immediately stop any unsafe evolution that could result in damage to equipment or injury to personnel. Assessors will not participate in or interfere with any evolutions conducted, however if unsafe evolutions are observed, the assessment team has the authority to halt the evolution and provide immediate remediation.

### **Q5. Who receives the final assessment report?**

**A5.** The final report is distributed to the owning ECH II/III commands within 30 days of the assessment. While discrepancies are documented, the assessors are also focused on capturing the “why” behind the discrepancy and want to understand what factors led or contributed to a particular discrepancy or issue of non-compliance.

### **Q6. Who receives the final assessment report?**

**A6.** The final report is distributed to the owning ECH II/III commands within 30 days of the assessment.

### **Q7. What response is required by the assessed command once they receive a copy of the final assessment report?**

**A7.** No response is required for these assessments. The information and results are for the chain of command to use internally to work issues and trends.

## NAVSAFECOM ASSURANCE AND ASSESSEMENT CONTACTS

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