“Safety is not a department, it is a responsibility borne by every Sailor, Marine, and leader.”

— M.M. Gilday, Chief of Naval Operations

When most people hear the words “Safety Management System” (SMS), their eyes glaze over and they lose interest (that happens to us in the SA division too). Hang with us for a second, because we can boil it down a bit. Have you ever heard the force protection saying, “If you see something, say something”? At the deckplate level (and dirt level, for Marines and shore-based folks), that’s what SMS means to you.

A SMS is really about managing risks and hazards to avoid harming people (that’s you) or breaking things. We won’t bore you with every detail and element of the SMS, because that bores us in the SA division too, and you can read all that in the instructions. We’ll just hit some key points so—along with the “see something, say something” mantra—you’ll know what it’s getting at. And yes, the Navy and Marines both have an SMS. References for both services’ SMS are in the key takeaways.

The SMS has four desired outcomes or “4Ps”: Safe Places, People, Property/Materiel and Processes/Procedures—simple, easy to remember. To achieve these outcomes, the SMS assigns responsibilities and risk acceptance to the appropriate levels of command from the Chief of Naval Operations to the individual Sailor/Marine/Employee. Why should you care? It’s simple. The SMS applies to everything we do, from maintenance to warfighting, and without you doing your part, the system fails and we lose the fight. Not convinced? Here are some mishap examples, including one averted mishap, that relate to each of the 4Ps (and you).

**Place. A safe workplace or working environment.**

A ship was conducting routine operations when the crew received indications of a fire in the No. 1 Gas Turbine Generator (GTG). The crew secured the GTG, confirmed the fire via visual reports and released CO2. Immediately thereafter, a fire alarm sounded for the deck gear locker, two decks above the No. 1 GTG. The fire was located in the uptake trunk near the deck gear locker. The fire was extinguished and no personnel were injured; but the damage caused over 100 lost mission days and over $2 million. The cause: bales of rags stored in the uptake trunk in violation of multiple directives.

—Improper storage in the workplace can lead to devastating damage and loss of warfighting readiness. In this case, the ship had to cancel the remainder of their deployment. Maintain a safe workplace; your life could depend on it.

**People. Service members and civilian employees are trained and qualified on all aspects of their work. This outcome includes working safely, regardless of role, level or position.**

An Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) impacted the ground when the capture hook separated from its wing during recovery. The mishap caused more than $700,000 in damage and the total loss of the aircraft. The cause: Mounting screws were not installed on one of the capture hooks, which were later found on a maintenance table. This misstep was avoidable had a Quality Assurance (QA) inspection been done. However, none of the maintainers were trained or certified to perform the QA. —We owe it to our teams to provide them with the training and certifications they need to do their jobs.
And remember, “Let’s be careful out there”

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In plain English, **safe to operate** means your place, people, property, and processes/procedures are designed correctly for you to safely do your job. **Operating safely** means executing your mission within the designed safety envelope (usually by following established procedures), controlling exceptions when they happen, and communicating unmitigated risk up the chain (“see something, say something”).

### THE NEW PROCESS IS WORKING

In the first several local area assessments, NAVSAFECOM assessors visited multiple units in fleet concentration areas and passed the safety-related trends to the appropriate higher-level commands who could take action. In a number of cases, the reason these issues existed at the unit level is because the commanders with the power to fix them didn’t know about them (why “**say something**” is important at all levels of the chain). Here’s a sample list (not all-inclusive) of some issues that are now being addressed by higher-level commands now that they know about them from the assessments.

- Facility electrical safety
- Hazardous material storage and handling
- Aircraft hangar fire suppression systems
- Berthing barge habitability
- Personnel and manning issues

### Key Takeaways

An effective SMS happens with a culture that self-assesses (looks for chances to “**see something**”) and self-corrects; where continuous learning identifies and fixes problems while they’re small; where risk ownership and accountability are held at the appropriate level; and hazards and near misses are promptly communicated (“**say something**”) up and down the chain of command. Now you have an idea of the desired outcomes and how they each work together to help keep you safe.

1. **Know your role.** From this dispatch, you have a basic understanding of the SMS and your role in it. Your challenge is to live up to that role every day. The culture we speak of occurs when everyone at your unit shares a safety mindset, you included. It goes beyond simply following procedures. It’s a shared attitude where all hands operate safely because it is the right and normal thing to do, not just to pass an inspection or complete a checklist.

2. **If you see something, say something.** At the deckplate and dirt level, as you do your job and execute the mission, SMS is about looking for risk, fixing it when you can, and reporting up the chain when you can’t (**the same process happens at every level of the chain**). If something doesn’t seem safe, tell your supervisor. If you are a supervisor, and you can’t fix it, tell your supervisor, etc. Don’t assume undue risk to you or your unit by suffering in silence. If you don’t speak up, your chain of command won’t know about it and can’t address the issue. This new SMS is designed to break those barriers, but it takes everyone’s commitment to make it work.

For more on the SMS, check out the **Who We Are What We Do** page on our public website here: [navalsafetycommand.navy.mil](https://navalsafetycommand.navy.mil).

### References:

- Marine Corps Safety Management System, Marine Corps Order 5100.29C

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