

### What is continuous improvement?

Continuous improvement is the ongoing effort a business makes to improve safety, while at the same time improving its products, services, and processes. Continuous improvement is a crucial consideration when implementing or further developing an effective Safety Management System (SMS). Your business can continuously improve its safety management by recognising the difference between managing safety and leading safety. Managing safety gets things done, but leading safety places more emphasis on showing employees why safety matters and why they should get involved in ensuring your transport activities are conducted safely.

Continuous improvement within an SMS focuses on the way things are done. It uses information you gain from your employees and safety assurance activities (including investigations, reviews, and audits) to identify areas in your SMS that could be improved. Improvements to your SMS can align with the commitment from your leadership team and the shared knowledge and understanding of everyone in your business that they have a responsibility to work safely.

### Why is it important to continuously improve?

It's important to continuously improve safety within your business to ensure your SMS remains effective and relevant and assists you to achieve your safety objectives. Continuous improvement also encourages employees to have a say, which can help solve problems and increase the safety and efficiency of your workplace and processes. Letting your employees know their involvement in safety and their ideas for improvement are important can give them a sense of pride and accomplishment and a greater sense of belonging to your business. A business that always considers continuous improvement is making a conscious commitment to improve the business and its safety outcomes. Businesses that actively look for ways to enhance safety are encouraging employees and managers to improve upon existing processes and try something better. A business that looks to continuously improve always believes there is something that can be done to further enhance the safety of its transport activities.

### How do you continuously improve?

Improvement starts with executives and managers exercising safety leadership and integrating your SMS into your normal business activities, rather than treating safety as a separate function. When a problem or incident occurs, you should see it as an opportunity to learn and improve your processes to prevent a recurrence. You can also encourage your employees by giving them the authority to solve problems, which should make your workforce more versatile and better able to deliver improved safety outcomes.



### How an SMS supports continuous improvement

A Safety Management System (SMS) helps your business continuously improve safety by providing a structured and repeatable way to identify issues, take action and review outcomes.

An effective SMS supports continuous improvement by helping you to:

- **Identify safety issues early**  
Hazard and incident reporting processes make it easier for workers and managers to raise safety concerns before they lead to serious incidents.
- **Assess and manage risks**  
A risk-based approach helps you understand what could go wrong, prioritise the most serious risks and put practical controls in place to reduce them.
- **Learn from incidents and near misses**  
Investigating incidents and near misses helps you understand what happened, why it happened and what needs to change to prevent it from happening again.
- **Monitor safety performance**  
Tracking safety data, such as incidents, hazards and audit results, allows you to identify trends, measure performance and check whether controls are working as intended.
- **Manage change safely**  
Change management processes help you assess safety impacts when introducing new vehicles, routes, technology, contractors, or work practices.
- **Review and improve systems and processes**  
Regular reviews of policies, procedures and controls help ensure your SMS remains current, effective, and aligned with how your business operates.
- **Strengthen safety culture**  
Ongoing training, communication and leadership commitment encourage positive safety behaviours and shared responsibility for safety.

By regularly reviewing information, acting on lessons learned and making targeted improvements, an SMS supports a cycle of continuous improvement that keeps safety practices effective and relevant as your business grows and changes. It is a good idea to track your continuous improvement by using a Continuous Improvement Register.

### Continuous Improvement Register

A Continuous Improvement Register is a simple tool that helps your business record, track and follow through on safety improvements identified through your SMS.

It supports effective continuous improvement by helping you to:

- **Capture improvement opportunities in one place**  
The register records safety issues, improvement ideas, audit findings, incident learnings, and management review actions, so nothing is overlooked or forgotten.
- **Track actions from start to finish**  
Each improvement can be assigned an owner, a due date, and a status, making it clear what needs to be done and who is responsible.
- **Prioritise safety improvements**  
The register helps you focus on the most important actions by considering risk level, urgency, and potential safety impact.
- **Monitor progress and effectiveness**  
Tracking updates and completion dates allows you to see whether actions are progressing as planned and whether changes are delivering the intended safety outcomes.
- **Support accountability and oversight**  
Managers can review the register regularly to confirm actions are being completed and to remove barriers that may be delaying progress.
- **Demonstrate ongoing improvement**  
A well maintained register provides evidence that your business is actively identifying issues, taking action, and reviewing results, rather than treating safety improvements as one off tasks.
- **Feed into management reviews**  
Information in the register supports SMS reviews by highlighting trends, recurring issues, and areas for further improvement.

By providing a clear, structured way to manage actions over time, a Continuous Improvement Register helps turn safety insights into practical improvements and supports the ongoing effectiveness of your SMS.

