

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.

Start your SMS continuous improvement journey

If your business has a few or no SMS elements in place, you may want to consider a phased approach to implementing all the elements of your SMS. A good place to start is to:

- read the Introduction to *Safety Management Systems in the Heavy Vehicle Industry* booklet at www.nhvr.gov.au/sms
- complete the SMS Checklist at the back of the booklet.

A suggested phased implementation schedule is outlined in the following table, with the elements highlighted for each phase.

Implementation schedule - SMS elements	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Safety policy and documentation				
Management commitment				
Safety responsibilities				
Key safety personnel				
Documentation (SMS Manual and procedures)				
Third party interactions				
Safety risk management				
Hazard identification and reporting				
Risk assessment and mitigation/treatment				
Risk monitoring and review				
Incident reporting				
Safety assurance				
Internal safety investigations				
Safety performance monitoring and measurement				
Change management				
Continuous improvement				
Safety promotion and training				
Safety training and education				
Safety promotion				
Safety communication				
Positive safety culture				

Continuous improvement review

You may find it useful to review the questions on the next page to see which or elements you have implemented or where you can further improve. The questions are aligned with the suggested phased implementation schedule.

Continuous Improvement – Quick Guide

Phase 1

- Do you have management commitment to your SMS?
- Have you developed and documented your safety policy?
- Have you identified and documented key safety positions and responsibilities and are these understood?
- Have you established a hazard identification and reporting process?
- Have you established a risk assessment process that evaluates and treats identified risks associated with existing tasks?
- Do you continuously monitor and review the current and proposed risk treatments you have identified?
- Have you established an incident reporting process that includes reporting of near misses?

Phase 2

- Have you established, or are you in the process of establishing, a documented SMS?
- Have you developed and documented your safety procedures?
- Have you confirmed with the third parties you interact with that they understand, and comply with, their safety duties under the Heavy Vehicle National Law (HVNL)?
- Do you re-examine your risk treatments when you review or investigate an incident or near miss report?
- Have you established an internal safety investigation process that includes investigating incidents and near misses, and focuses on making safety improvements rather than looking for individuals to blame or discipline?
- Have you identified the current and future training needs of your employees?
- Do you encourage and use every opportunity to promote safety?
- Do you encourage and use every opportunity to communicate safety?

Phase 3

- Have you established a risk assessment process that considers the risks associated with new tasks?
- Have you established safety objectives for your business?
- Do you encourage everyone in your business to get involved in improving your safety performance?
- Do you conduct periodic internal safety audits, checks on procedures and reviews of risk treatments to confirm your systems are working as intended?
- Have you considered involving an external auditor to review your safety systems and performance?
- Do you plan and prepare for change in your business?
- Do you believe your business has a positive safety culture?
- Would you consider that your employees believe your business has a positive safety culture?

Phase 4

- Have you established a review framework or process where you reassess your documents, processes, responsibilities and third party interactions?

The NHVR has developed additional guidance material and templates to assist you in developing and improving your SMS.