



BUILD THE Structure

Five years ago, we happily celebrated the centennial of heavier-than-air powered flight. This year, 2008, marks a more somber centennial, that of the first fatality in an airplane.

Having had the accidental good fortune of designing an airplane that allowed them to crash gently while they learned how to fly, Wilbur and Orville Wright successfully flew for nearly five years without serious mishap, a remarkable record. That string came to an end on Sept. 17, 1908, when a new propeller fractured during a demonstration flight at Fort Myer, Virginia, U.S., causing Orville Wright to lose control and crash, the impact killing Lt. Thomas Selfridge. A pioneer of great potential, Selfridge already was a dirigible pilot and he designed an airplane that flew.

Every aviation death diminishes the industry and robs it piece by piece of its moral authority, regardless of any subjective judgment of a person's value. While this regard for the sanctity of life is a major force driving aviation's safety mania, the traveling public's aversion to risk in an aircraft has pushed the industry even further to achieve an unequaled level of safety.

As we have discussed in previous stories and columns, the past decade

has witnessed the development of safety strategies and tools that have allowed the industry to break through to new levels of risk reduction. In this issue, we discuss the next manifestation of that safety offensive, the adoption of safety management systems (SMS).

As the three stories on that topic clearly describe, many in aviation are confused or stalled in their progress by the seeming enormity of the effort of implementing SMS.

However, since most of what constitutes SMS involves institutionalizing the strategies and tools developed over this past decade, many operators already have or are installing some SMS components. Actually, the fact that an SMS mostly is composed of smaller programs is an important take-away for those who, from a distance, see SMS as an enormous, imposing safety edifice.

Beyond the attributes of its component pieces, the unique aspect of SMS is that its reach must extend beyond the safety and operational parts of any aviation organization to include every department and every person, especially in the upper management level. Active support from management compounds the impact of these powerful safety

programs by enhancing their visibility within the corporation.

All that I have just said is better stated by the authors of our three SMS stories. My message is to emphasize the importance of every aviation organization beginning to move forward in building its own SMS edifice, one piece at a time if necessary, but moving forward with a goal of eventually having a fully realized SMS in place at some specific point in the not too distant future.

Years of exposure to a succession of management programs, each promising astounding improvements in corporate efficiency and profitability, may put many managers in a cynical frame of mind, distrusting the latest "flavor of the month" being served up by management gurus. As we have said, there is nothing untested or novel about the SMS components: These things work. SMS is the structure that empowers them to work to best effect. Start your installation today.

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J.A. Donoghue".

J.A. Donoghue
Editor-in-Chief
AeroSafety World