Overview: The Stages of Safety Management Systems Implementation

The Department of Defense (DoD) Safety Management Center of Excellence (SMCX) has a process to assist workplaces implement safety management systems (SMS). This three (3)-stage process of continuous growth and maturation works best to implement SMS criteria, tackle obstacles, and employ activities and initiatives to drive continuous safety improvement. The DoD SMCX uses the Plan-Do-Check-Act Model for continuous improvement as the foundation for the process and assists workplaces throughout each phase. This one pager describes the process the DoD SMCX employs.
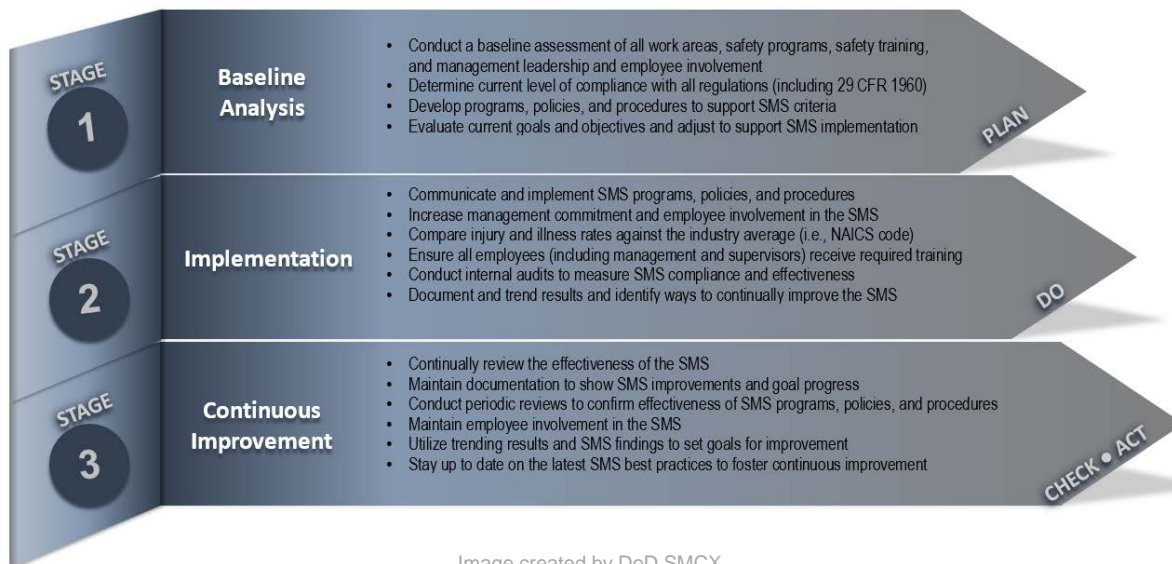

STAGE 1 — Baseline Analysis (PLAN)
- Conduct a baseline assessment of all work areas, safety programs, safety training, and management leadership and employee involvement
- Determine current level of compliance with all regulations (including 29 CFR 1960)
- Develop programs, policies, and procedures to support SMS criteria
- Evaluate current goals and objectives and adjust to support SMS implementation

STAGE 2 — Implementation (DO)
- Communicate and implement SMS programs, policies, and procedures
- Increase management commitment and employee involvement in the SMS
- Compare injury and illness rates against the industry average (i.e., NAICS code)
- Ensure all employees (including management and supervisors) receive required training
- Conduct internal audits to measure SMS compliance and effectiveness
- Document and trend results and identify ways to continually improve the SMS

STAGE 3 — Continuous Improvement (CHECK • ACT)
- Continually review the effectiveness of the SMS
- Maintain documentation to show SMS improvements and goal progress
- Conduct periodic reviews to confirm effectiveness of SMS programs, policies, and procedures
- Maintain employee involvement in the SMS
- Utilize trending results and SMS findings to set goals for improvement
- Stay up to date on the latest SMS best practices to foster continuous improvement

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★ STAGE 1 – BASELINE ASSESSMENT ★

SMS implementation begins with a baseline assessment, comparing existing safety and health (S&H) processes against a specific set of SMS criteria. Additionally, all SMSs assume a foundation of compliance. The assessment team looks at the workplace environment, practices, and documentation in comparison to applicable S&H regulations (e.g., Occupational Safety and Health Administration, internal requirements, guidance issued by your chain of command, external technical authorities, and 29 CFR 1960). The following steps are part of Stage 1:

- Form an assessment team, including safety and industrial hygiene staff, at a minimum; consider adding others with relevant skills (e.g., managers, process owners, qualified specialists)
    - Determine assessment tools to use (e.g., written checklists) and list regulatory requirements and SMS criteria to evaluate, leaving space for the team to record assessment results; consider reaching out to other worksites implementing similar SMS criteria to see if they will share their checklists
- Train the assessment team in the assessment process and assessment tools
- Complete the baseline assessment, recording any compliance and/or SMS opportunities as actions items

★ STAGE 2 – IMPLEMENTATION ★

Create an action plan to address all gaps identified during the baseline assessment. Manage the action plan like a project—assign responsibilities, identify deliverables, set priorities, and establish target dates for each action item. Assign actions to non-safety professionals (e.g., managers, employees) to increase employee involvement in the SMS. Ensure those assigned with responsibilities routinely provide status/progress updates in a written tracking system. Additionally, provide periodic progress reports to top leadership so they stay informed on the status of open action items. Follow and implement SMS criteria and address open action items until all SMS criteria is integrated into your workplace's environment and practices. The following steps are part of Stage 2:

- Involve non-safety professionals in developing action plans and taking action to increase their safety knowledge and help build the safety culture (e.g., participate on inspection teams, committees, or internal review teams, identify solutions to abate hazards, write hazard analysis documents)

- Train all personnel involved in action plan development and implementation on assigned roles and functions

- Document change plans, implementation progress, and assessment findings

- Trend S&H data to evaluate the effectiveness of SMS-related changes, including lagging indicators (e.g., accidents, injury and illness rates) and leading indicators (e.g., training completed, near-misses investigated, hazards identified and controlled) – use the findings to make decisions on what works well, and what needs to be improved

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- Share key changes, implementation progress reports, and process effectiveness assessments with leadership and the entire organization for continued awareness and support

★ STAGE 3 – CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT ★

Continually improve the SMS and the safety culture. Conduct an honest and comprehensive internal review of the SMS, at least annually, and document opportunities for improvement. Consider conducting periodic external reviews to validate your internal review process and identify any overlooked areas. Higher headquarters, peer sites, or contractors may conduct your external reviews.

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Trend the data and findings from internal and external reviews to determine the effectiveness and maturity of your SMS. Include affected employees in addressing recommendations for improvement.

Effectively applying the three stages of SMS implementation can enable any worksite to build a robust and highly effective S&H program and a great safety culture

For additional information on the SMCX's services, please visit the SMCX-hosted website at: https://www.smscx.org/.