Structure

An SMS can be structured in various ways. A common approach is to separate the policies from the operational procedures by using a Safety Management Plan and standard operational procedures, forms and checklists.
The structure you use must suit the complexity of your operation and the amount of risk involved. It must also suit your team and any external auditing requirements.

Safety Management Plan (SMP)

Your SMP is at the heart of your SMS documentation. It describes your plan for managing and improving safety across your entire operation including health and safety policy, overarching safety processes and referencing all your operational documentation such as standard operating procedures, forms and checklists.
Your SMP is the document your safety auditor will use as the basis for reviewing how you manage safety in your operation.



Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

SOPs include detailed operational information that identifies risk for specific activities and describes how they will be managed in the day-to-day running of an operation. They are also sometimes called Activity Plans or Activity Management Plans.
SOPs tend to fall into two main categories:

- activity specific
- associated operational areas, e.g. staff induction or driving.

Safety Forms & Tools

Safety forms and tools are used to gather, record, and provide safety information. They are often useful for ensuring that SMP policies are followed. They should be referenced in the SMP.
Examples include staff induction checklists and training records, whiteboards for hazard updates, staff meeting minutes, risk registers, risk assessment and management strategy forms (RAMS), trip reporting forms, incident reporting forms, signage and client briefing videos.

Documenting

Involve your team as much as possible in the development of your SMS. Not only do they hold much of the information about safety, but the system must work well for them.

Tools & Templates

The **Tools & Templates** section contains templates, guidance, forms and checklists and some examples from operators and other sectors.

The templates are based on the Safety Audit Standard for the Adventure Activities Regulations. If used alongside other resources on this website, they will support you to meet the regulatory audit requirements. They are also useful for developing a SMS for all other adventure activity operations.

Deciding what should be covered by your SMS

- know the purpose of your operation - does it vary for different participants or activities?
- know your **legal requirements**
- use **risk management processes** to ensure you focus on the most important risks
- check out the **adventure activities audit standard** - treat the standard as a series of questions and see if you can answer all of them
- use the information in the **templates and tools** section
- check **good practice information**
- identify the specific activities and jobs within your operation e.g. driving, guiding, food handling
- consider roles covered by contractors, volunteers and trainees
- consider different locations where you undertake your activity
- consider seasonal differences
- look at the approach taken by other operators running similar activities.

Capture the detail

Keep your system clear and simple but provide enough detail so that it's useful. Your system needs to work well for your team and be tailored to fit the specific context of each activity.

- Clearly differentiate your non-negotiable 'must-do' procedures from those where you allow greater degrees of judgement and initiative
- Describe what you will typically do (don't include things that you won't actually do)
- Use language that works for your team
- Keep it clear, simple and consistent (in terms of layout and terminology)
- Avoid large blocks of text - use bullet points, check boxes, flow charts, images, maps etc.

A diagram that shows the structure and components of your SMS is a useful tool for communicating your system.

Document control

Your SMS documentation needs to be current and accurate to be safe.

- keep track of page numbers, file name, version number and date next review dates (footers can help)
- include the version number in the title and only have the current versions in circulation
- use consistent and clear document names, including appendicies
- clearly show when your documentation will next be reviewed – internally and externally
- state where your documents will be kept (hard and electronic copies, back-up copies, archives etc)
- know how amendments will be made and tracked including who is responsible for signing off changes and preventing use of out of date versions

Create a section in your SMS that lists:

- appendices
- supporting documents and other items
- who must have access
- who is responsible
- where they are stored
- when and how they are to be checked and updated.

Reviewing

Review your systems regularly, using in-house and external reviews. This will help ensure that:

- over time, your systems are the best they can be
- your systems are captured accurately in your safety management documentation.
- your systems are aligned with industry good practice and legal requirements
- you and your team are 'walking the safety talk'

Someone must have responsibility to ensure that reviews take place and any resulting actions are followed up.

Even if you are not legally required to have an external audit, it is good practice to have regular external checks of your safety system. Note, external audits are mandatory for operations covered by the **Adventure Activities Regulations**.

In-house reviews

In-house reviews cover all components of your SMS, including what you actually do in the field.

This should be a systematic process but does not have to be done all at once, rather it should happen as part of a normal day and via more formal 'audit' style processes. E.g. discussion at pre or end of activity briefings, staff training events, scheduled checks of specific parts of your SMS such as looking for incident trends or pre-season equipment checks.

- Make a plan of what you will check. When, how and who is responsible for making it happen

- Reinforce the culture that staff are personally responsible for following agreed safety systems
- Foster a culture where feedback is welcome on anything and everything
- Make sure that concerns are addressed and the SMS is updated where needed
- Do reviews at a time that suits your operation e.g. larger audit style checks at quieter times or on bad weather days
- Consider using a peer review e.g. a reciprocal safety system check with another operator
- Encourage and take into account client feedback
- Factor-in learning from previous external reviews and technical advisor reports.

Involve your team; it's not a solo effort! However there must be someone responsible for the review, they must be competent for this role and be well supported by senior leadership. Owner operator businesses should use an external technical advisor.

What to check

Your safety system checks should, over time, cover all aspects of your SMS and include:

- checking your systems against external measures such as activity safety guidelines, audit standards and current legislation requirements
- triggers for an internal safety check including key staff changes, hazard changes, incidents, new or changed activities, changes to legal requirements
- observing your staff on the job. Are they following agreed procedures, and if not, why not?
- analysing your incident data with all staff to remind them of previous incidents, what actions were recommended, look for trends and ensure that correct follow-up action has been undertaken
- checking SOP's, forms and other similar safety tools. Are they correct, useful and being used as intended?

Documenting your reviews

Documenting your reviews is important. Use methods that suit the type of review e.g. keeping a copy of trip report forms or recording a more formal review of your staff induction system. Records should show:

- Who was involved in the checking process
- When and which areas of your SMS were checked
- How the checking occurred e.g. by observing staff running an activity or by reviewing checklists and forms
- Actions resulting from the checks, and details on when and how they are followed up
- When and how your operation was checked against external measures e.g. activity safety guidelines or an audit tool

"We have a rolling roster for checking our systems. Every three months two of our team check our systems e.g. is the guide training up to date? Is the crisis plan accurate? Are the first aid kits sealed and in the right place? It's done on a weather day and helps to keep all of our staff involved with the running of the place..."

External Checks

External checks range from regulatory to voluntary audits, or using an external safety advisor to come and review a part of your SMS. Note that it is considered good practice to have an external safety audit even if you are not legally required to do so.

To get maximum value out of an external check:

- organise it well in advance and for a time that suits your operation
- select an audit provider that suits your needs and your operation
- contact your auditor early to ensure that you both have all the information you need, including their audit criteria
- know the audit standard that you will be checked against and use it to do your own internal check before the audit
- know the key areas where you would value advice and ensure you draw on your auditor's experience to get the answers you need
- ensure that as many of your team are on-site as possible, especially key staff
- allow time for required follow-up actions and audit completion
- many of the components mentioned under 'in-house reviews' will apply here as well.