

ORDER IS BETTER THAN CHAOS: BUT SAFETY MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS ARE NO PANACEA

by

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ABSTRACT

Safety management systems are routinely offered as the solution to the safety problems of industry yet there is very little empirical evidence in the literature regarding their effectiveness. Recent research would suggest that just as there are many different types of systems, there are also wide variations in the effect they have on operational safety. While companies with immature safety systems will often make short term performance gains regardless of the type of intervention applied and it is also true that those companies which rely on administrative and procedural interventions alone also only achieve short term performance gains, those that use human factors countermeasures and administrative procedural controls to enhance multi-faceted engineering preventive measures gain maximum benefit from their safety systems.

Accordingly, it is likely that fully developed comprehensive safety management systems emphasise both engineering design solutions and human factors countermeasures in the mitigation of accidents.

Notwithstanding, there are some spectacular real-world examples of safety management system failures, yet many safety regulators, including those in aviation, continue to push for companies to introduce safety management systems without an understanding of what's working and what's not. This paper reports on some contemporary research which may explain in part why these management system failures occur and offers suggestions for improvement in the safety management system regulatory regime.

A copy of the full paper can be downloaded from the following address

www.protosafe.com.au/publications/

About the author:

Geoff Dell is a career systems safety, risk management and accident investigation specialist with over 27 years experience across most industries. He leads a successful safety management consultancy, Protocol Safety Management P/L, and has been a part time Senior Research Fellow at Monash University Accident Research Centre. He was Flight Safety Adviser at TAA/Australian Airlines from 1979 to 1990.

Geoff has recently submitted his Doctoral Thesis for examination. He holds a Master of Applied Science Degree and a Graduate Diploma in Hazard Management and has an aircraft accident investigation qualification from USC. He is a private pilot.

Geoff Dell holds several honorary appointments including Dean of the Safety Institute of Australia College of Fellows and he is a Member of the Boards of Directors of both the Aviation Safety Foundation of Australasia and IPSO Australia (The Institute for Human Safety and Accident Research). He is also Chairman of the Australian Society of Air Safety Investigators Membership Committee and was twice Seminar General Chairman for Australia's largest safety management exposition the Safety in Action 2004 and 2005 Conferences both held at the Melbourne Exhibition and Convention Centre. In 1997, in Dubai, UAE the Flight Safety Foundation recognised Geoff's research into the causes and prevention of fatal aircraft pushback accidents with their inaugural Ramp Safety Award.