

First Steps When Implementing an SMS

Deciding to implement a safety management system (SMS) at your organization might seem like an overwhelming process, but it doesn't need to be! Break the process into steps, tackling one step at a time. The SMCX recommends the following steps in your early stages of implementing an SMS:

DEFINE YOUR ORGANIZATION'S SAFETY AND HEALTH GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Why are you deciding to pursue and implement an SMS at your organization?

- Do you want to ensure your organization is in regulatory compliance?
- Do you want to reduce injuries and illnesses?
- Do you want to better manage safety and health (S&H) processes and procedures?
- Do you want to improve overall S&H throughout your organization?

These are all questions that help shape your S&H goals and objectives. A successful SMS helps you create, develop, and achieve them. In this step, you need to identify "who" and "what" falls under the scope of your SMS and what you hope to accomplish by implementing it.

COMMUNICATE TOP MANAGEMENT "BUY-IN"

The most critical step when implementing an SMS at your organization is communicating top management support. Commitment from top management increases your chances of success. When a sincere message reaches your employees, it helps move things in a positive direction quickly!

Start by verbally communicating top management commitment to the rest of the organization. This message should come from top management itself, whether it is during a meeting or an organization-wide event. More importantly, follow-up verbal commitment with a commitment statement developed and signed by the highest-ranking official in your organization. A signed statement of commitment shows official emphasis by top management. Post this commitment statement in conspicuous locations throughout work areas so it is readily available to employees.

REVIEW YOUR ORGANIZATION'S BUDGET AND RESOURCES

Make sure your organization has the budget and necessary resources to implement the SMS successfully. What do you need to implement the SMS? Consider whether personnel need training, how to communicate the SMS components, and if time away from your site's mission is necessary. Resources include subject matter experts, monetary funds, and time to complete SMS-related tasks.

CHOOSE A "CHAMPION" FOR SMS IMPLEMENTATION

Choose a champion with the authority to take initiative and implement the SMS. This person should have heightened knowledge of your goals and objectives and the capability to manage a project. The champion is someone who is familiar with the SMS and someone you believe will successfully increase understanding in your organization. Also, ensure the champion has the time to lead SMS tasks and is actively promoting SMS in the organization, not just sitting behind a desk!

DEVELOP AN SMS COMMITTEE AND GAIN EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT

Develop a committee comprised of several levels of employees representing different parts of your organization. Encourage participation from leadership, supervisors, and various types of employees throughout the workforce. If feasible, involve contractors or any outside support personnel (e.g., industrial hygiene, safety, maintenance, occupational health care) who can affect the success of the SMS. A cross-functional team promotes a more effective SMS and allows employees to take ownership. When employees take ownership, there is typically less pushback in SMS implementation and a greater chance for long-term success.



The image shows the top management and employees working together to implement an SMS. Image retrieved from [Bing images](#) (free to share and use).

SUMMARY

Establishing clear goals and objectives in support of your SMS will help ensure you move in the right direction as you begin your SMS implementation. Ensure you find ways to communicate the commitment from top management of your SMS efforts—what’s important to your boss is important to you! You also want your workforce to understand the SMS and the positive changes and impacts it will have on their S&H. With the right resources, an influential Champion, and involved employees, you will be prepared to make a positive impact on S&H in your organization!

For more information on how to choose the right SMS, prior to beginning implementation, see the SMCX one pager:

“First Steps When Choosing an SMS”

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