Safe & sound

Creating a safety management system to suit your aviation business makes sound business sense.

Merran Williams

IT ONLY TOOK a moment. Alan turned his back on the trolley he was using to load freight into the wing locker, and the prop-wash from a nearby plane sent the trolley rattling across the tarmac towards another plane that was about to taxi.

Fortunately, he turned in time to grab the wayward trolley and prevented what could have been an expensive incident for Queensland regional airline, Skytrans. If the trolley had crashed into a propeller, the company estimated the damage could have cost more than $50,000.

Worried about the possibility of another incident, Alan took immediate action to ensure the trolley was chocked and unlikely to move when loading. He also took his concerns to Skytrans' safety manager, who gave a commitment to resolve the problem and asked Alan to raise the issue at the airline's next safety committee meeting.

Alan did so, and told other members of the committee it would cost only $200 per trolley to fit handbrakes. All were in agreement. For the cost of just $600, the company has potentially saved thousands of dollars in repair bills and lost aircraft time.

According to CASA Aviation Safety Promotion general manager, Mike Smith, Skytrans is an excellent example of an aviation business that has tailored a successful safety management program to fit its needs.

"Skytrans has truly benefited from formalising its safety management system," Smith said. "There are direct cost benefits in both flight operations and maintenance. There is a real sense of ownership which reflects a prospering safety culture."

Skytrans managing director, David Barnard has seen this firsthand.

"Having a safety management system for Skytrans has been absolutely great," he said. "It's allowed input from staff into safety and operational matters. It provides us with a positive marketing tool. It helps create business opportunities by providing customers with a known high level of service and safety."

Managing director of Network Aviation, Lindsay Evans agrees.

"We believe the safety management system we have in place is actually saving us money through better practices," he said. "The people who work for us have a better appreciation of safety in general."

A small business servicing remote areas of Western Australia, Network has been running a safety management system for three years. The company won an an Aviation Safety Foundation Australia award this year for safety excellence. New employees spend half a day of their two-day induction program learning how the program works and the contribution they can make to workplace safety.

Positive morale: "We emphasise that staff will not be penalised and no punitive action will be taken if they put something forward that might be a little delicate," Evans said. "This means we've succeeded in having free flowing information up and down the chain."

Chief pilot, Richard Hurd concurs. "The employees now have a lot of trust and believe when they report something that it will be looked at carefully," he said.

Hurd has seen many benefits flow from Network's safety management system, including the development of a comprehensive business plan.

"Having it in place has helped us gain additional contracts, created a positive morale within the company and made it a safer and more enjoyable place to work," he said.

Mike Smith is not surprised at the advantages Network has received from safety management.

"Their system has developed from a reactive one, to one which actively seeks to identify hazards and put in place appropriate solutions."

Smith sees company-wide commitment as the key to successful safety management. "Everyone from the CEO down needs to be involved," he said.

"One of the failings that I see with systems in some companies is that they have the process to identify the hazard, they have a process to decide what they're going

to do about it, if anything. But they don't have good feedback mechanisms that go back to the reporter and the rest of the organisation. This feedback needs to say: We've identified this hazard and have put in place this mitigation for it. Or, we identified this hazard and we are not going to mitigate because we recognise that this is a risk that we're going to accept in the conduct of our business. It is this feedback loop that is vital if staff are going to have an ongoing commitment to the system."

Business information: Smith says businesses might be surprised at what they find when they develop a safety system. "Putting in place a good safety management system gives you a formal process to review the safety of your business," he said. "In doing this you find out an awful lot of other information about how your business is running, such as what things are costing you money and the opportunities for savings."

Smith points out that some companies will only allow their employees to fly with airlines that have a formal safety management system in place.

"The mining industry is one that is keen to see the systems in place, largely because they have them themselves," he said. "The concept of safety management from the oil and gas industry was further developed by the industry following an accident on a North Sea oil rig (Piper Alpha).

"The subsequent inquiry furthered the view that companies have safety systems in place for the benefit of the organisation,

its staff, customers and shareholders, not just the regulator."

Safety management expert, James Reason, sees effective safety management as more about the company's mindset and the way it treats workplace hazards, than about cost.

" If you're a small operator then there is going to be a call upon resources, but it doesn't have to be a call upon money… You have tremendous advantages if you are small. *"*

"If you're a small operator then there is going to be a call upon resources," he acknowledged. "But it doesn't have to be a call upon money, because you're a flexible organisation – you have tremendous advantages if you are small.

"What you've got to do is build a system that's not something which seems like an extra job to do. It should be integrated into the actual management process.

"Ideally the safety system should be homegrown and fully integrated into the current task so that in a year's time it doesn't feel like doing it is an extra job;

it's a part of how you do your business."

Sunstate Airlines Qantas Link, a regional passenger airline providing services across Queensland, has found this to be the case. It formalised its safety management system in 1996 with the appointment of a flight safety manager. Former flight operations manager and chief pilot, Arch Van Dongen says safety management has become an integral part of managing the airline.

"I don't think you can afford to run a business without managing safety," he said. "I don't think it costs that much. It costs some time and resources but certainly the alternatives aren't very palatable. And once you have the system in place, it becomes easier to manage and gives you a lot of useful information about running your business."

It's about people: Chief engineer, Paul Lee-Horn likes the unity that has developed within Sunstate since the implementation of safety management.

"What I've found is the success of the safety management system has been the ability to bring all the departments of the airline together with a single goal," he said. "That is, to achieve the best safety record possible for this airline."

For Mike Smith, safety management is about people. "It's about making organisations, big and small, value the inputs of their people and actually deal with them in a way that addresses the hazards and safety problems," he said.

"Many companies have experience with quality systems and there is a lot of common ground here. I simplify the distinction between a quality system and a safety system by observing that a quality system is about product and process, a safety system is about people."

He sees integrated safety management as the next big step in aviation safety. "We've concentrated in aviation on not harming our passengers and our crew," he said. "Safety management takes that a step or two further, and the spin-off of improving the integration of a safety system within your business is making savings that flow to the bottom line."

Fact: Successful safety management programs not only reduce the likelihood of accidents, they also increase productivity and profit...

... and we can prove it

Systems of Safety Management

The Australian Experience
Interactive Workshop

Hear how Australian aviation professionals have made safety management work for them.
"Systems of Safety Management: The Australian Experience" includes morning presentations followed by afternoon interactive workshops that will help you set up and maintain your own safety management system.

To register for this **FREE** event fill in the tear-out form on page 31 and post it today
(no stamp required); or register online at www.casa.gov.au/hotpics/seminars/registration.htm
Registrations may also be faxed to 02 6217 1950 or emailed to Workshops.Register@casa.gov.au

More details can be found under 'hot topics' on the Casa website: http://www.casa.gov.au/hotpics/seminars/

SYDNEY 29 July	**DARWIN** 2 August	**ADELAIDE** 7 August
Wesley Conference Centre	Rydges Plaza, Darwin	The Chifley on South Terrace
BRISBANE 31 July	**PERTH** 5 August	**MELBOURNE** 8 August
Holiday Inn Brisbane (Centra)	Rydges Perth	Eden on the Park

8:00am Registration   9:00am - 12:00pm Speakers   1:00pm - 5:00pm Workshops

CIVIL AVIATION
SAFETY AUTHORITY
AUSTRALIA