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### **Do you Really Have a Safety Management System?**

Over the past few years I have been asking various aviation organizations, either directly or indirectly, if they have a Safety Management System (SMS) in place. Many of the responses are emphatically “yes!” I then ask what their SMS “looks like?” What I am expecting to hear is something to the effect of, “we have an SMS in place based on the Four Elements of safety, with an emphasis on safety risk management.” However—instead—some of the answers are, “we have an SMS manual,” or “we have safety meetings every month,” or “everyone follows the procedures.” Never even a mention of safety risk management, which is one of, if not thee, most important elements of the SMS. This is extremely problematic!

It is obvious that some safety managers are having a hard time understanding what is required of an SMS. An SMS is not simply “a book that sits on the shelf” or an assumption that “everyone is working safely.” Instead, an SMS is a formal *system* for the management of safety, which is based on the Four Elements (or pillars) of safety, which are 1) Safety Policy, 2) Safety Risk Management, 3) Safety Assurance, and 4) Safety Promotion. Each of these elements must be in place (and functional) in order to claim that you have an SMS.

Once you do have these Four Elements up and running, you can then proclaim that you truly have a *system* in place to effectively manage safety. You will then—for example—be able to show me, among other things, your safety policies, the way your safety hazards are identified,

how your risks are mitigated and monitored, how you assure that your SMS is functioning effectively, and the formal processes that you use to promote safety within your organization. And believe me; it will be much more effective than that book that's collecting dust on your shelf! That's not an SMS...that's an SM Mess!