

A Non-Standard Heavy Vehicle Operator SMS

Explanatory Note

In 2018 the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator (NHVR) introduced legislation which has fundamentally changed the way in which heavy vehicle operators manage their compliance with the Heavy Vehicle National Law. What became known as Chain of Responsibility (CoR) imposed various safety duties and responsibilities on anybody considered to be within the chain.

Industry education and information, at the time, predominantly targeted traditional trucking organisations. One of the key methodologies, that the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator (NHVR) and peak trucking industry bodies advocate for, as a way to ensure compliance with CoR, is the adoption of a Safety Management System - SMS.

Many operators of heavy vehicles do not consider themselves a trucking business but the use of heavy vehicles is integral to the day-to-day business. Organisations such as government agencies, councils, mining companies, farming organisations, manufacturer, food outlets, construction businesses - the list is endless.

There are unique risks associated with non-standard operations which this document endeavours to capture and provide a methodology to manage. Potential issues and risks include:

- staff undertaking multiple CoR roles
- roles undertaken intermittently impacting currency and competence
- staff undertaking heavy vehicle duties as part of their “day job” with conflicting obligations and imperatives
- lack of understanding or resourcing of heavy vehicle activities
- mixed fleets and varying schedules causing additional complexity

These are but a few, but they have the potential to inhibit an organisation’s ability effectively manage the transport risk associated and to acquit their heavy vehicle

responsibilities. This SMS is specifically designed to assist them to manage the safety of their transport task.

Like all SMSs they are not a “one size fits all”. The following guidance is offered to assist in the understanding and application of the SMS.

- An SMS is not a document. It is a methodology to manage safety within a business environment and delivers commercial, compliance and safety benefits. To realise these benefits the SMS must be committed to and implemented.
- This document is a “signpost” document (as most good SMSs should be). It details what the SMS should look like, and include, to assist in the management of transport risks. All organisations should have an SMS with similar elements.
- Each area of the SMS should have a corresponding process or procedure outlined elsewhere that supports the SMS function. The procedures (the how to do any one task) associated with the SMS should be developed within a document, or series of separate, documents. As an example, the SMS has a requirement for monitoring the speed of drivers - the details of how this is achieved should be detailed in a compliance manual or within the assurance procedures. Depending on the size and complexity of your organisation the resourcing and associated procedures may be simple or more complex.
- For a smaller organisation the majority of the functions may be the responsibility of one or two people and be quite simple. Using the speed monitoring example, this may be the owner or supervisor reviewing driver reports/breach notices or telematics information. For a larger organisation, this function may be within a safety or compliance branch, conducting detailed daily reviews of in vehicle systems or EWDs with alerting mechanism in place. In both instances however, they also need a process that describes how breaches are dealt with and by whom.
- Any change to the SMS should or could initiate a change to the procedure associated and vice versa.

The NHVR, and some industry associations, also provide useful information on their websites to assist operators on the basics of SMS development and CoR requirements.

Finally - the heavy vehicle operating environment is dynamic. As the transport task changes, challenges arise and risks develop. For this reason, the SMS cannot remain static or simply be a manual that sits on a shelf. It must continually improve and evolve to reflect the needs of the business, the regulator and community expectations regarding safety.