



There are a number of things happening within the International System Safety Society (ISSS) that are important to the future of the organization and to the system safety profession as a whole. My guess is that the President's (Russ Mitchell) Message, and some other parts of this issue of *Journal of System Safety*, will contain additional information about these potential changes. I hope that we will not be in significant disagreement about the nature of the new direction.

Leading indicators of these changes are our focus on the four (or possibly five) "initiatives" that were begun a couple of years ago. These initiatives focus on standardization, training/education and certification. The importance of this is that the ISSS has adopted a renewed stance that the Society has a duty and responsibility to actively promote and enhance the system safety profession by creating new materials, training opportunities, alliances and associated activities. This is a shift from our historical stance of waiting for things to come from chapters and a few energized members, and supporting whatever develops as best we can. It is the difference between being proactive and reactive at the Society level.

Our reactive mode served us well as long as we were supported by trusted and engaged "customers" who had the resources to create requirements and guidelines demanding and funding our services. Thus, the original MIL-STD-882 development and management activities were performed by a few large government contractors, in conjunction with direct military support. They created effective and mutually acceptable requirements that supported their safety contractual needs via the G48 Committee. The ISSS hosted these activities at our Conferences, and provided a forum for international exploration and dissemination of system safety engineering practices. This was an effective and efficient relationship whereby the government and large corporations worked out what they

needed, and we assisted by providing a forum and recommendations for the development and exchange of new ideas.

However, the downside of this approach is that little attention was given to the non-government contracting sectors of industry. Many industry sectors (e.g., transportation, semi-conductor equipment, machine tool manufacturing, medical devices, petroleum refineries, etc.) recognize the value of the system safety approach, but because we are so focused on supporting the needs of our primary government customers, they have to figure it out on their own. Inevitably, this results in a wide variety of approaches, many (perhaps most) beginning with the ideals of system safety, only to have them change into mostly "compliance-based" design requirements — often barely giving lip service to the original system safety concepts.

The 2008 financial downturn created an immediate and *dramatic* decrease in the government's financial support for system safety services. This resulted in a major decrease in the membership of the ISSS and in the number of practicing system safety engineers in the field. While the economy has generally recovered from the downturn, the system safety profession and the International System Safety Society have not. However, interest in the field by those industries outside of our normal "customer base" is rapidly increasing as companies recognize that they are facing difficult system-related risks that are best analyzed and controlled by a systems approach.

We therefore have an opportunity — and a problem. The opportunity is that many industry sectors have begun to recognize the value and need for our services. The problem is that the ISSS is understaffed and poorly prepared to meet the demand. These two sides of the issue are driving significant changes within the Society.



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As the new Director of Conferences, I am hoping to change the Conferences to be more active in providing targeted training and educational opportunities for our attendees. Conferences have always been a major source of training and educational activities, but in a rather ad hoc, “take what shows up” sort of way. We will continue to offer ad hoc presentations and ideas leading to the growth and enhancement of our profession. However, we will mix these with more intentional offerings specifically designed to assist those who are not experts in the many details and techniques of the field. We hope to retain the overall flavor of the Conferences, but will offer more intentional courses on the “basics” expected of a system safety professional (both engineers and managers). The goal is to provide enough depth and breadth to offer a respected certificate of attendance for these courses. Initially, this certificate will only indicate attendance, rather than actual knowledge, because effectively measuring knowledge is a more complicated activity than we can currently implement. The hope is that the certificate will at least provide evidence that a person has been exposed to the profession and the most useful approaches. Perhaps we will be able to provide a much more meaningful certification based on experience and testing (such as a BSCP in system safety), but we are currently not in position to do so. We are taking the first steps toward an eventual certification process.

In addition to providing more targeted training offerings, I intend to use the Conferences as a vehicle to work on task forces directed toward achieving our existing “initiatives” — plus any that we feel the need for in the future.

The ISSS is also embarking on a new management structure whereby the Executive Council acts as a Board of Directors (BoD), with much of the actual work of running the Society performed by a hired association management company (AMC) that assists the BoD by performing many of the day-to-day basic tasks. An AMC is an independent service provider offering services and solutions for associations. This often includes customer service, administrative assistance, management solutions and strategic guidance to organizations on a fee-for-service basis. In its essence, an AMC acts as the home office, managing the everyday tasks of nonprofits, societies, boards and other associations. They can do the parts that we are not good at, leaving to us the parts that we are good at, such as understanding what system safety is all about and providing services in direct support of the needs of the profession.

The use of an AMC to help with the operations and planning of ISSS activity appears to cost significantly more than we have been spending on ISSS overhead. However, that isn’t exactly true. When we rely on volunteers to do all (or most) of the activities of the Society, we are actually accepting their “in kind” donation as if it is somehow “free.” Perhaps it is free

to the Society, but it certainly isn't free to the volunteer. In most cases, this donation is the same as what the person does for a living — and should be valued as such; it just doesn't show up on the books. These volunteer efforts are real and are extremely valuable donations of time, resources and expertise — worth many tens of thousands of dollars a year from our generous volunteers. The point being that we already accept large donations to do the work of the Society, but we don't track that value on our books.

A more important aspect of using the services of an AMC is that they can do a *lot* of things much better than we can. It is our belief that this enhanced ability will result in significant savings on some of our expenses, and significant increases in income from others. We believe that hiring this company will more than pay for itself, resulting in more money for the Society to accomplish more projects and activities that are within our sphere of expertise.

I am excited and optimistic about the near- and long-term future of the ISSS. It feels like the Society

has turned a corner and is back on track to meeting goals that have been suggested for a new and updated mission statement. These goals include:

- Advancing the state-of-the-art of system safety
- Contributing to a meaningful managerial and technological understanding of system safety
- Disseminating newly developed knowledge to all interested groups and parties
- Improving the public understanding of the system safety process and discipline
- Promoting system safety to all levels of management, engineering and other professional groups
- Fostering communication within the system safety profession and with other scientific, legal, public and professional groups
- Encouraging research into the development and application of new safety management, scientific or engineering techniques
- Encouraging system safety professional development and education ●