ISO

a practical guide

ISO 21101

Adventure tourism –
Safety management systems

a practical guide

for SMEs

ISO 21101

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iTeh STANDARD PREVIEW
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Views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of ISO.

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Foreword

Adventure tourism is a 'people business'. All adventure tourism organisations, no matter where they operate in the world, are responsible for people's safety. Adventure tourism activities involve risks, and providers have to manage those risks. The consequences of not doing so can be catastrophic.

Although all providers manage safety to some extent, some may take a less systematic approach than others. To promote a more systematic approach to managing safety in adventure tourism, ISO has published ISO 21101:2014 *Adventure tourism — Safety management systems — Requirements*. The Standard sets out the requirements for a safety management system (SMS) that can be used by all types and sizes of providers, operating in different geographic, cultural and social environments.

A provider can use ISO 21101 to:

- enhance safety performance
- meet expectations for participant and staff safety
- demonstrate safe practice
- support compliance with applicable legal requirements.

The benefits of having an SMS that conforms to the Standard could include a better safety record, a strong reputation as a safe provider, and improved service delivery overall. This, in turn, could lead to positive feedback from participants, more bookings, revenue growth, better staff engagement, and improved relations with business partners, suppliers, regulators and other interested parties.

Introduction

This guide is designed to help you apply ISO 21101 to develop, implement and continually improve an SMS for your adventure tourism activities. It is aimed primarily at small businesses.

The guide sets out a logical sequence of activities, and it can be useful to work through it in order. However, there may be times when you will find it helpful to work backwards and forwards as you develop aspects of your SMS and clarify your understanding of the requirements. Doing so may assist you to stay focused on the 'big picture' — the entire SMS — if you find yourself getting hung up on the detail.

Each section of the guide starts with a question to stimulate thinking and discussion. Even though some of these questions could be answered as a 'yes', you are encouraged to read the section in detail to ensure that you are meeting all of the requirements of the Standard. After explaining the importance of the requirement, further questions and guidance delve deeper into what is needed and how you can achieve it.

While this book provides some guidance on how to meet every requirement in the Standard, the guidance is necessarily generic due to the diversity of the global adventure tourism sector. The guide provides some examples and illustrations, but do not limit your thinking to them. Take your own situation and unique circumstances into account.

In addition, some of the concepts in the Standard, such as planning and risk management, have whole fields of study devoted to them. The guide will help you to meet the requirements of the Standard, but we encourage you to extend your knowledge of the various concepts as part of your continual improvement process.

Two other ISO publications relate to adventure tourism. ISO 21103:2014 *Adventure tourism — Information for participants* specifies the minimum requirements for information to be provided to participants, before, during and after adventure tourism activities. Some elements from this Standard have been incorporated into 6.3, *Communicating with participants*.

ISO/TR 21102:2013 *Adventure tourism — Leaders — Personnel competence* sets out desirable competencies and the related expected results of competencies for adventure tourism activity leaders common to any adventure tourism activity.

This guide does not set out the exact text of ISO 21101. You can purchase a copy of the Standard — and the other publications mentioned — from your national standards body or from ISO directly at sales@iso.org or through the website www.iso.org.

1 Preparing to plan your SMS

1.1 Getting started

Do you have an SMS? If so — is it consistent with the Standard?

What is an SMS?

A **management system** is a set of interacting elements within an organisation to establish policies and objectives, and the processes to achieve the objectives.

An **SMS** is a management system that is focused on safety. The interacting elements of your SMS could include processes, tools, people, and approaches. Your SMS will be documented, but it is much more than what you put on paper — it is the actual things that you do to keep your staff and participants safe.

Why is this important?

Making a decision to establish an SMS consistent with the Standard demonstrates your commitment to providing safe adventure activities.

While you may already have some of the elements of an SMS, working through this guide will help you to ensure that your SMS is complete and interactive. It will assist you to tie together these elements into a cohesive, documented system that you can continually review and improve.

How do you develop and implement an SMS?

The rest of this handbook provides guidance on what to put in place and how to do it.

1.2   Context

How well do you understand the context your SMS operates in?

Why is this important?

Your SMS needs to fit your operation. A 'one-size SMS' will not fit all adventure tourism operations.

To establish and operate an effective SMS you need to have a good understanding of *your* organisation's specific context — both external and internal. This allows you to develop an awareness of factors that could affect your ability to achieve the outcomes you are aiming at for your SMS, and to plan to address them.

Context refers to the circumstances or situation in which you operate.

How do you develop an understanding of your context?

In this step you will scan the environment outside and inside your organisation to identify things that could affect your achievement of safety objectives. These things could make it easier to meet objectives, or could make it more difficult.

Don't limit your thinking to the examples set out below; you may identify a wider range of external and internal factors. Also, each factor you identify could have both positive and negative impacts.

External factors

You could identify external factors by, for example, talking to customers and people in your networks, reviewing communications from organisations you subscribe to, or doing internet searches.

You might identify things that relate to:

- Competitors — how many competitors operate in the same area you operate in? Are new competitors intending to operate in your area?
- Regulators — what obligations do they place on you?
- Standards and codes of practice — are there new requirements or improved practices to consider?

- Community infrastructure — can you access roads, paths, waterways, or other facilities? Are changes planned?
- Insurance obligations — does your insurer place requirements on you, such as to hold certification or to submit evidence of safety planning?
- Community attitudes — do they affect where, how, and when you operate?
- Seasonal issues — does the weather or increased tourist numbers affect your operation?

Internal factors

You also need to look inside your organisation to identify things that could affect your ability to meet your safety objectives.

To do this you could talk to staff, review records, and think about your long-term strategies.

You might need to consider:

- Your purpose — what are you in business for? What activities do you provide?
- Booking numbers — are they trending up or down?
- Participants — do you need to accommodate differences such as age, language and ability? What expectations do participants have?
- Finance — are your finances healthy? Are margins being squeezed?
- Equipment — is your equipment fit for purpose? Are there new equipment trends and technology you will need to keep up with?
- Staff — are you able to recruit and retain good people?
- Leadership — is top management committed to safety and providing strong leadership?
- Incident history — what are your incident numbers and trends?

> **Top management** means the person or group of people who directs and controls your organisation at the highest level.

What do you do with this information?

You will use this information as a starting point to define the scope of your SMS, develop safety objectives, and identify risks. From there you will establish more specific actions to deliver your adventure tourism activities safely.

To understand the context her scuba business operates in, Sofia of SuperScuba asked her five staff members to help her gather information to feed into a group discussion. First, they focused on factors outside their business. They talked to their professional diving association, did some research on the internet and talked to local regulators.

The team then focused on internal matters. They reviewed their purpose and strategies, customer lists, incident log and business records. Financial records indicated that there was a comfortable amount of money in the bank, and the maintenance plan showed that they needed to invest in a new air compressor.

While Sofia and her team were already aware of much of the information they gathered, this exercise allowed them to bring it all together to develop a shared understanding, and to make sure their knowledge was up to date. They also learned new things, including that the dive association was increasing its reporting requirements and that a new competitor would be setting up in their area. Through a group discussion they learned that a long-standing staff member planned to retire that year.

All of this information will be used by Sofia as she works through the rest of the Standard.

1.3   Interested parties

How well do you understand the needs and expectations of interested parties?

> An **interested party** is a person or organisation that can affect your organisation, or be affected — or think that they are affected — by something that your organisation does.

Why is this important?

Understanding the safety-related needs and expectations of interested parties will enable you to plan how to respond to them. The needs and expectations of these parties can vary and you need to take the whole range into account when planning your SMS.

Who might be an interested party?

Interested parties could include:

- participants and their families
- staff and volunteers
- visitors and members of the public
- competitors
- regulators
- emergency services
- funding agencies and investors
- certification bodies and training organisations
- insurers
- suppliers
- professional associations.

Don't limit your thinking to this list — there may be others. And within each group there may be subgroups whose interests differ.

How do you identify interested parties?

To identify interested parties you could talk to staff and your professional networks, and review key documents such as:

- customer records
- marketing plans

- strategic and business plans
- legislative requirements
- procurement records, contracts, agreements, and licenses.

How do you identify their needs and expectations?

Once you have identified interested parties, you will need to develop an understanding of their needs and expectations. It could be useful to:
- get staff input
- talk to individuals or representatives in the groups you have identified
- review customer feedback
- think about your relationships with suppliers, contractors, regulators, and so on.

What needs and expectations could interested parties have?

You may identify a wide range of interested parties with an even wider set of needs and expectations. Some participant groups may seek different levels of adventure due to age or physical ability.

You could discover that some of the needs and expectations of interested parties are not consistent with the way that you plan to achieve your safety objectives. For example, some participants may expect more direct supervision during the activity, rather than just relying on your initial safety briefing and demonstration. Or they may have differing expectations about the composition and size of the group, and the number of guides or instructors.

What do you do with this information?

You will use this information when you define the scope of your SMS (see 2.1), set safety objectives (see 2.3) and consider risks and opportunities (see 2.4).

You might also consider this information when you are planning to communicate about your SMS (see Section 6), and operating your adventure tourism activity risk management process (see 2.5).