

Regional Safety Verification Plan (RSVP)

Introduction

Mission Safety International (MSI) has developed a Regional Safety Verification Plan (RSVP) in order to encourage and ensure a high level of safety in mission aviation operations worldwide. This voluntary program is designed to use the considerable experience and wisdom of the operators and combine it with the specialized expertise of MSI in a peer review audit and consultation process. In general terms, the program works as follows:

Each participating base of operations will be assigned to a regional group made up of other bases located in the region and a regional supervisor. The participating bases nominate representatives who serve on a regional consultation committee, which conducts safety consultations of each base in its region, under the oversight and supervision of the regional supervisor. At the conclusion of each consultation, a report is generated, and sent to the regional supervisor and MSI.

The regional supervisors report to MSI, who reviews reports, coordinates any needed follow-up, and distributes pertinent safety information and findings as appropriate. MSI also conducts training sessions for the regional supervisors and consultation committee members, and if needed, arranges to have qualified personnel visit bases to deal with specific issues that may come to light. MSI will also conduct periodic “spot check” consultations, to ensure that the program is working as intended.

Rationale

The need for accountability is a human trait that has been very well documented and analyzed—Biblically, in academic studies, and in the behavioral and social sciences. Human beings need some stress from the outside in order to perform their very best. MSI’s RSVP program strives to provide that needed accountability in a positive and constructive way.

One of the unique approaches that RSVP incorporates is the use of peers in the consultation process. Too often, the considerable wisdom and experience of the older pilots and mechanics has not been passed down effectively to the younger generations. Sometimes this is due to lack of opportunity to share what they have learned in an appropriate setting. The safety consultation setting provides an ideal time to allow experienced professionals to share some of their wisdom and lessons learned in a non-threatening environment. Additionally, they are observing and taking note of good things that are being done by the base being visited, which they are then taking back to their

own base to put into practice. In this way, we have an informal, but effective way to encourage “best practices”, and are passing valuable lessons learned down to successive generations. Although having peers “police themselves” may at first appear to contradict current industry practices, MSI has found in the 23 years we have been conducting safety consultations that this approach is most effective.

Another thing that MSI’s experience has shown is that permanent change usually results when the people involved “discover for themselves” that there is a better way of doing things, not necessarily when they are forced to do something by someone “from the outside”. This “discovery” can be a result of guidance, teaching, experience or observation, but is necessary to achieve full buy-in and internalization. The need for personal buy-in is particularly strong in situations such as single pilot flight operations in small planes where monitoring or observation of personnel’s actions is difficult or impossible. Too often we’ve found a pilot was following non-standard procedures for years, with their supervisors none the wiser until an accident occurred. Typically pilots will not “confess” to this practice to those who hold some kind of authority over them, or can get them fired, such as outside auditors hired by the management. However, in our experience, they will often confide in trusted peers who they perceive are there to help them, and they willingly take the peer’s advice, especially if they hold the peer in high esteem. The RSVP program will provide an excellent means for this to take place.

It is also worth noting here that written policies and procedures are just that—written. They may look great, but if they are not followed in practice, they are not doing any good. Sometimes discrepancies occur between the policies and practice due to the fact that the policies are not realistic or practical. Unrealistic and impractical policies that don’t match the “real world” are often the result of the policymaker’s lack of information or feedback, or perhaps their pursuing a political agenda (make it look good). The feedback may not be actively sought, or is ignored, or even worse, those who give it are branded as not being team players. This unhealthy cycle must be broken in order to achieve true safety, and the RSVP approach addresses that, with opportunities for the pilots and mechanics to honestly critique policies in a non-threatening environment to trusted peers who will listen and hear them out. This allows policies to be modified to match real life, and the likelihood that they will then be followed increases exponentially, thus resulting in much safer operations.