

“Safe in an unsafe world: Bringing Safety-II into practice”

Prof. Erik Hollnagel, Professor at the University of Southern Denmark

The sustained existence of modern societies depends on the safe and efficient functioning of multiple systems, functions, and specialised services. Because these often are tightly coupled, safety cannot be managed simply by responding whenever something goes wrong. Both theory and practice make clear that safety management that follows developments rather than leads them runs a significant risk of lagging behind and of becoming reduced to uncoordinated and fragmentary fire-fighting. (The same, of course, goes for the management of quality and productivity.) In order to prevent this from happening, safety management must look ahead, not only to avoid that things go wrong but also – and more importantly – to ensure that they go right.¹ Proactive safety management must focus on how everyday performance usually goes well rather than on why it occasionally fails, and must actively try to improve the former rather than simply prevent the latter.