



The Virtual Chapter of the International System Safety Society (ISSS) has had an interesting round of discussions during the past few months, some of which might be of interest to all members of the Society. These topics have been rattling around in my head since I was president of the Society in 1990, but have never seemed to get traction with others. I was thrown back into thinking about these issues at the last International System Safety Conference (ISSC) when I discovered that several years ago, the G48 Committee published a new “commercial version” of MIL-STD-882 and that this new version is now owned — and marketed — by SAE. Not only is the standard now the property of SAE, but so is the G48 Committee! SAE has begun advertising and promoting the idea that it, rather than the ISSS, is the owner and source for all things related to system safety engineering — selling the new standard, as well as papers written by folks who I consider to be key ISSS members, and providing training and workshops on system safety engineering.

I was rather shocked by this turn of events, and spent the rest of the Conference talking to as many people as I could about their opinions of this change, as well as what they were looking for from the ISSS. Based on those discussions — and more that have occurred during the past few months — the Virtual Chapter has begun to explore questions such as “does the ISSS provide the services needed and/or wanted by its members?” Are there services and products (such as training, standards, guidelines, etc.) that would enhance the effectiveness of the Society? Is the “vision” of the Society appropriate for today’s climate? Are there changes that the ISSS can, or should, make to promote the system safety approach worldwide?

My current opinion is that the ISSS should be the global “source” for all things related to system safety engineering. That means we should:

- Create and maintain *the* accepted standard describing system safety best practices
- Be the key technical source concerning how system safety should be done

- Provide high-quality training, mentoring and assistance for new system safety engineers
- Actively promote the practice throughout industry and government

That doesn’t mean that we necessarily create the *only* system safety standard, but it does mean that we should be the “owner” of the “mother of all system safety standards.” Specific industries should create their own industry-specific versions, but these daughter versions should directly and obviously trace back to the “mother” standard worldwide. This new standard must also provide enough information to allow industry and academia a framework within which to create suitable safety standards and curricula for themselves.

Basically, I believe the Society needs to rebrand itself as the world’s source of knowledge of how to provide high-quality, highly effective system safety practices to achieve enhanced safety, quality, reliability and environmental impact for all products and services.

While these ideas seem to be generally agreeable to many members of the ISSS, there is little — if any — agreement about how this rebranding might be implemented. These are the topics that the Virtual Chapter has been discussing.

Perhaps the first topic that we need to agree on is a consensus “vision” of a future, enhanced ISSS. We are attempting to figure out what the membership wants, desires or needs from the organization. We are currently at the point of “blue sky” thinking in attempting to describe what we, as individuals, would like, with the eventual goal of bringing these individual dreams into a coherent and consistent vision statement that drives the future of the Society. We are soliciting comments and ideas from all of you on this effort. Earlier, I described some of my personal dreams of what *I* believe the role of the Society should be. I also want to make sure that the Society provides fellowship and friendships, professional and personal sharing of ideas and knowledge, and a feeling of belonging to an important, respected organization and profession.



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Another aspect of the future Society is the creation and maintenance of a “mother” standard that spawns “daughter” standards in many industrial and government sectors. This will require a significant revision of the wording and format of the current “MIL-STD-882-ish” approach. Rather than the current focus on tasks and procedures, I believe our new standard should focus on goals and approaches. It needs to be specific enough that daughter standards and safety programs can be evaluated to determine whether they do, or do not, follow established system safety engineering approaches. At the same time, the standard must be general enough so that daughter standards can be designed to fit into existing management, legal and funding environments.

There are currently a number of initiatives to introduce “design for safety” practices into engineering curricula. I believe that the ISSS should actively participate in these initiatives to ensure that high-quality system safety philosophy, practices and processes are followed. We should help make sure that design engineers incorporate system safety into their design practices and are knowledgeable about the field of system safety so that they can easily assist in the implementation of more formal system safety programs where they exist. All engineers should understand that “design for safety” following high-quality system safety processes appropriate for their projects is an expected, integral part of their job description. It is my belief that the ISSS needs to be capable of providing assistance to organizations and universities as they struggle with finding ways to implement these goals.

At some point, the question of how can we accomplish all of this within the current all-volunteer organization must be raised. The answer is, simply, that we can’t. We will need to have a paid, full-time technical staff on board to do these things. That means we will need to evolve the funding model from its current dependence

on membership dues and Conference fees to a different approach. The Virtual Chapter is currently exploring what options might be available to us. Selling our written materials, similar to what SAE is now doing with its cache of system safety documentation, is an obvious opportunity but certainly won’t bring in enough revenue to achieve what seems to be needed. My personal feeling is that we need to find a way to get much more corporate/government sponsorship.

I believe that we are offering a process and a profession that is extremely valuable to businesses worldwide. Once we have created an acknowledged “best practice” body of knowledge and standards that are accepted by industry and the legal profession, there will be a much more level playing field, with consistency and dependability in safety engineering practices and programs. This is a valuable service to industry and government — one that needs to be supported by these entities as the end user of our products, services and highly qualified membership. Currently, the ISSS is supported by the employees of these organizations; we need to change that so that employees are treated as a valuable resource. I am talking about a change in perspective. Is it up to the individual employees to pay for the education and services required by industry, or is it up to the industries to make sure that their employees are provided with the resources needed to perform their jobs? It is in the best interests of industry and government agencies to support the ISSS to ensure that effective, efficient and acceptable system safety practices are promulgated throughout industry.

This whole thing seems to be an investigation into some rather far-reaching changes. Maybe they are *too* far reaching, or maybe their time has come. I anticipate some lively discussions on these topics, and more, at this year’s Conference — if not as a formal part of the Conference, at least as a topic of hallway discussions. ●