Is a heavy vehicle SMS the same as a health and safety management system?

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Not quite, but they overlap a lot. A work health and safety (WHS) system protects your workers. A heavy vehicle safety management system covers the safety of your transport activities, including the public on the road. Both use the same risk approach, so most small operators can run one system that covers both.

Two laws, one approach

What	Work health and safety (WHS) laws	Heavy Vehicle National Law
Who has the duty	A person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU)	Every party in the chain of responsibility
The duty	Ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the health and safety of workers	Ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the safety of your transport activities
Main focus	Your workers - the yard, the workshop, plant, loading docks	The truck on the road - fatigue, speed, loading, maintenance - and the public
Regulator	Your state or territory WHS regulator	The NHVR (not in WA or the NT)

The NHVR says the Heavy Vehicle National Law builds on principles that already existed in WHS law. Both ask you to find the risks, assess them, and remove or reduce them as far as reasonably practicable.

One system, not two

Many businesses run one system for WHS, heavy vehicle safety and even quality, because they share the same approach. That means less paperwork and one way of doing things. For example:

- One risk register that covers yard and workshop risks and road risks.
- One way to report incidents, near misses and hazards.
- One set of induction and training records.
- One set of procedures, with the heavy vehicle parts - fatigue, mass and load restraint, maintenance - clearly included.

Make sure the road risks are in there

A general WHS system often focuses on the workplace and misses what happens on the road. The NHVR says the key is making sure heavy vehicle risks to the public and your chain of responsibility duties are clearly covered.

Road risks your SMS should cover

- Fatigue and fitness for duty
- Speed and scheduling pressure
- Loading and load restraint
- Vehicle condition and maintenance
- Driver competence and behaviour
- Routes, road conditions and dealing with other road users

General information, not legal advice.

Sources

NHVR - Safety management FAQs - https://www.nhvr.gov.au/safety-accreditation-compliance/safety-management/faqs

NHVR - Introduction to safety management systems in the heavy vehicle industry (2026) - https://www.nhvr.gov.au/files/media/document/884/202606-0798-sms-introduction-to-sms-in-the-heavy-vehicle-industry.pdf

NHVR - Safety Management Systems (SMS) - https://www.nhvr.gov.au/safety-accreditation-compliance/safety-management-systems