What are the 5 elements of a safety management system?

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Under the NHVR's SMS Standard 2026, a heavy vehicle safety management system has five elements: leadership and commitment, risk management, people, assurance (monitoring and improvement) and safety systems. Every Heavy Vehicle Accreditation audit checks all five, in proportion to the size of your business.

The five elements

Area	In plain words
Leadership and commitment	The boss owns safety, sets the rules and procedures, makes time and money for it, and builds a culture where people can raise safety issues without reprisal.
Risk management	You identify hazards, decide how to control the risks and check the controls work.
People	Drivers and staff are trained, fit for work and know what is expected.
Assurance, monitoring and improvement	You review how things are going - including internal reviews of your system - look into incidents and fix what is not working.
Safety systems	The everyday systems: maintenance, fatigue, loading, records and how it all fits together.

The five areas are broken down into 19 smaller parts that the auditor checks.

Where they come from

The five elements are set by the SMS Standard 2026, which was approved by transport ministers on 13 May 2026. Every Heavy Vehicle Accreditation audit is done against it. If you are not accredited, it is still a good guide to managing your safety duty under the law.

Small operators

The NHVR applies the standard in proportion to the size and complexity of the business. An owner-driver with one truck is not expected to have the same system as a 200-truck fleet - but the system still needs to be written down, used and working.

General information, not legal advice.

Sources

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

NHVR - SMS Framework - https://www.nhvr.gov.au/safety-accreditation-compliance/safety-management/sms-framework

NHVR - HVA operator FAQs - https://www.nhvr.gov.au/safety-accreditation-compliance/national-heavy-vehicle-accreditation-scheme/nhvas-transition-to-hva-scheme/hva-operator-faqs