

What's "Safety Culture" (and why Should I Care)

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What:

Safety culture is the collection of the [beliefs](#), [perceptions](#) and [values](#) that members of an organization share in relation to **risks**. It's sometimes described as "what happens when no one's looking."

Why:

Weakness in safety culture leads to mishaps—the Chernobyl disaster and the Space Shuttle accidents are well-known examples. Of course, this happens on a smaller scale too. On the other hand, [Industrial Safety & Hygiene News](#) shows that a mature safety culture benefits all aspects of the organization, including morale, retention, and operational success. It's about [protecting our people](#) and the assets the U.S. Air Force has entrusted us with.

Who:

Leadership—especially commanders—sets the example and tone. "Influential leaders" such as safety officers and program directors can make a big difference too. Commanders don't need to be experts in the safety program to "talk the talk and walk the walk." Understand how the CAP Safety Principles tie to CAP's Core Values, particularly excellence and integrity, as explained on the [CAPSafety](#) website.

When:

Always—underlying culture doesn't turn off.

How:

The CAP Safety Management System is a template for achieving an excellent safety

culture. CAPR 160-1 lists four components to be emphasized for an informed and involved safety culture. To summarize:

Reporting Culture. The need to report mishaps, deviations, near-misses, lessons learned, observed hazards, and improvement suggestions should be constantly emphasized by leadership at every level.

(Wait—does that mean telling on each other? No—it's just being honest about what's working and what's not, which is the only way to improve.)

Just Culture. Members must be confident they will be treated fairly when they report. Leadership should foster an environment of trust where members are encouraged and even rewarded for reporting safety related information, while realizing there is a line to be drawn between acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

Learning Culture. Leaders at all levels should show a willingness to learn from errors as well as successes, inspiring members to follow their lead...The key to a learning culture is exemplified in an inquisitive mind; constantly seeking information on what might go wrong or what did go wrong, and what could prevent it.

Flexible Culture. This is realized when the tenets of safety RM are employed at every level and at all missions and activities throughout Civil Air Patrol and in our members' daily lives...individuals and groups fully understand and routinely apply safety RM processes as a matter of habit.