



# President's Message

*International System Safety Society President  
Robert Schmedake*

## How Far We've Come

In preparing for my final President's message, I have reflected on what we have accomplished. I mean this in both the general, with regard to the discipline of system safety, as well as the specific with regard to the last two years in the International System Safety Society.

One of my favorite hobbies is restoring antique radios. I was recently reminded of some hazards associated with an antique radio where the use of a non-polarized plug can result in a hot chassis — a potentially fatal mistake. This was a common feature of early electrical designs. Today, we take it as a given that plugging in an appliance is a safe act. With these older systems, the metal chassis could deliver a fatal shock if the user were to come in contact with it (<http://www.geojohn.org/Radios/MyRadios/Safety.html>).

Consumer protections and industry standard practices have created a much safer environment for the world and the consumer. In our industry, many hazards that were previously identified by accident are now controlled by safer practices. It is in the area of the new and novel designs that we need to focus our attention. As we see unmanned systems being used to monitor highway or rail traffic, commercial space exploration, and increased use of automation in common appliances, we see where the opportunities for the discipline are growing. Are we able to adapt to this new world?

During the past two years in this office, I have seen the collapse of government-funded conference attendance due to budget constraints and the application of sequestration. The impact to this Society has been a reduction in attendance at conferences by at least 50 percent. This changed profitable conferences into events that barely break even. Prior to these two years of my term, half of our income as a professional society was derived from the International System Safety Conference (ISSC). Essentially, we are still using our reserves to weather this storm, but we are weathering it. We are still a viable organization, and we need to recognize the accomplishments we have achieved to get here. In Boston, we lost money at the conference. In St. Louis, we made enough money

to stay out of our reserves. In San Diego, we were able to renegotiate our commitment for room nights to a more manageable number and, hopefully, this will make the difference for the Conference team. I have a lot of faith in the energy and commitment of our volunteers, and I know we will survive this short-term adjustment. But it will be due to our ability to adapt to this new world. The budget situation won't get better in the foreseeable future. But we can adjust the scope of our activities and seek other ways to pay for this worthwhile organization.

The lesson I take away from this is that old formulas work, as long as we are working old problems. We need to apply our ability to assess the systems we are working with. These systems can be swarms of unmanned air vehicles, driverless automobiles, or just changes in the current marketplace. The field of safety has been around for many years, but system safety is still somewhat new. We need to apply our strength in understanding systems when we approach these novel problems of our future.

Since this is my last President's message, I want to thank the fine officers, directors and chapter presidents who I have worked with on the Executive Council. They have each contributed their time and energy to a society we are all passionate about. We do this because we see the value of a professional society dedicated to the development of this discipline. We do this because without this Society, there is a void left in our professional development opportunities that the Internet cannot fill.

These officers, directors and chapter presidents are the volunteer stewards of this Society and without their dedication, support and sacrifice, we have no Society. I wish Rod Simmons the best in his term as the next president, and I believe his executive council will be outstanding.

Before I close, I would like to acknowledge Cliff Ericson for his exceptional work as *JSS* editor. This is a volunteer position with no remuneration, and yet he pours his energy into the publication, issue after issue. His efforts are appreciated, even if recognition is rare. Thank you!

— Robert Schmedake