

# Audit of the effectiveness of the quality assurance system

## Swiss Transportation Safety Investigation Board

### Key facts

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The Swiss Transportation Safety Investigation Board (STSB) investigates accidents and serious incidents in public transport, civil aviation and oceangoing vessels. From among the roughly 2,100 reports it receives each year, it selects around 100 to investigate, based on the potential for improving safety. On the basis of the cause determined for the incidents, it makes safety recommendations to the supervisory authorities, including the Federal Office of Transport and the Federal Office of Civil Aviation, and sends safety advisories to the relevant industries. To ensure its independence, it is organised as an extra-parliamentary commission; administratively, it belongs to the Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications.

The SFAO performed an audit of the STSB and investigated whether its quality assurance system is effective. In order to avoid overlaps with the investigation of the National Council Control Committee (CC-N) on the activities of the STSB<sup>1</sup>, the SFAO focused on auditing the quality assurance system. The audit showed that the STSB has high requirements as regards investigations and reports. However, the processes should be made more efficient and the backlog of pending investigations should be rapidly reduced. In addition, there is a lack of end-to-end recommendation controlling, and systematic improvement processes should be established.

#### **Opportunities for improving process efficiency**

Owing to a lack of resources and the major accident involving the JU-52 in 2018, which took up a large amount of investigative capacity for a long time, an unusually high number of investigations are currently still pending. The audit revealed opportunities to reduce the workload for senior investigators as STSB specialists. The SFAO recommends that the STSB ensure that its processes, documents and methods are complete, regularly review them and align them with the duties of the senior investigators. Quality assurance should be supplemented with appropriate milestones and approvals, and structured so as to run alongside the process.

#### **Pending investigation points should be dealt with swiftly**

Currently, there are a large number of investigations which have not been completed within the prescribed timeframe. The STSB is working to reduce the number of pending cases, with the aim of ensuring that investigations can once again be completed on schedule. These pending cases do not give rise to an additional safety risk because, for safety-relevant findings, the STSB can publish and make use of interim reports.

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<sup>1</sup> CC-N, report of 21 November 2023 on the activities of the Swiss Transportation Safety Investigation Board.

Since 2019, the STSB has deployed various measures to reduce the number of pending cases. Investigations in the areas of railways and oceangoing vessels have been largely completed. In the area of civil aviation, it was possible to stabilise the number of pending cases, albeit at a high level. The STSB should therefore take measures to significantly reduce pending investigations in this area over the short term.

#### **Establish a continuous improvement process for quality assurance**

There is no systematic and implemented improvement processes, or systematic review of recommendations, to ensure the effectiveness as well as the permanent review and further development of the existing quality assurance. There is no provision for a regular review of processes, methods and documents. Currently, no capacity has been reserved for the steering, implementation and reporting of effectiveness and improvement processes.

**Original text in German**