International Union of Scientific and Technological Scholars

Journal of Low-Altitude Economy and Air Mobility
https://journals.cypedia.net/jlaeam

Article

Safety Risk Management and Path Optimization of Urban Low-Altitude Logistics Distribution: A System Dynamics Perspective

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ABSTRACT
Urban low-altitude logistics distribution, as a new form of logistics that integrates low-altitude airspace resources and intelligent transportation technology, has become an important breakthrough to solve the problems of urban „last-mile" distribution difficulties and high costs. However, the complex and dynamic characteristics of urban low-altitude environment, coupled with the imperfection of safety management systems and the immaturity of technical equipment, make safety risks become the key factor restricting the large-scale application of urban low-altitude logistics distribution. From the perspective of system dynamics, this study constructs a safety risk system of urban low-altitude logistics distribution, identifies the key risk factors and their interaction mechanisms, and establishes a system dynamics model to simulate the evolution trend of safety risks under different scenarios. Based on the simulation results, this paper proposes a path optimization strategy for safety risk management, including technical innovation, system improvement, mechanism construction and personnel training. The research results show that the safety risk of urban low-altitude logistics distribution is a result of the interaction of multiple factors such as environment, technology, system and personnel, and the comprehensive application of multi-dimensional optimization strategies can effectively reduce the overall safety risk level. This study enriches the theoretical research on urban low-altitude logistics safety management, and provides practical reference for government departments, logistics enterprises and related institutions to carry out safety risk prevention and control work.

Keywords: Urban Low-Altitude Logistics; Safety Risk Management; System Dynamics; Path Optimization; Last-Mile Distribution; Risk Simulation

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

With the rapid development of urbanization and the booming of the e-commerce industry, the demand for urban logistics distribution has shown an explosive growth trend. However, the traditional ground logistics distribution mode is facing severe challenges such as traffic congestion, high distribution costs and low efficiency, especially in the „last-mile" distribution link, which has become a bottleneck restricting the development of urban logistics . In this context, urban low-altitude logistics distribution, which takes unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), low-altitude helicopters and other aircraft as the main carriers, has attracted widespread attention due to its advantages of flexibility, efficiency, low cost and no restriction by ground traffic conditions . Many countries and regions have carried out pilot projects and practice explorations on urban low-altitude logistics distribution. For example, China has carried out low-altitude logistics distribution pilots in Shenzhen, Guangzhou and other cities, covering scenarios such as express delivery, medical supplies transportation and daily necessities distribution ; the United States has approved Amazon, Google and other enterprises to carry out commercial UAV logistics distribution services, and has formulated relevant management policies and technical standards ; Japan and the European Union have also introduced a series of supportive policies to promote the development of urban low-altitude logistics distribution industry .

Although urban low-altitude logistics distribution has broad development prospects, its safety risks cannot be ignored. The urban low-altitude environment is complex and changeable, involving factors such as buildings, power lines, meteorological conditions and pedestrian flow, which easily lead to flight accidents such as aircraft collision and crash . At the same time, the technical equipment of low-altitude logistics distribution is not yet fully mature, and problems such as battery failure, communication interruption and navigation deviation may occur during the operation process, which bring potential safety hazards to the distribution process . In addition, the safety management system of urban low-altitude logistics distribution is not perfect, including unclear division of regulatory responsibilities, lack of unified safety standards and imperfect emergency disposal mechanisms, which further increases the difficulty of safety risk control . According to the statistics of the Global UAV Safety Organization, more than 40% of low-altitude logistics flight accidents are caused by the combination of environmental factors, technical failures and management loopholes . These safety accidents not only cause economic losses to logistics enterprises, but also may threaten the personal and property safety of citizens, which restricts the large-scale and normalized development of urban low-altitude logistics distribution.

In recent years, scholars and industry circles have paid more and more attention to the safety risk management of urban low-altitude logistics distribution. Some studies have focused on the identification and assessment of safety risks, and have identified risk factors such as equipment failure, environmental interference and human error through field investigation and data analysis . Others have studied the safety management policies and technical measures of low-altitude logistics distribution, and proposed to improve the safety level through the formulation of unified standards, the application of intelligent monitoring technologies and the strengthening of personnel training . However, the existing research still has some deficiencies: first, most studies focus on individual risk factors or single management links, and lack a systematic understanding of the safety risk system of urban low-altitude logistics distribution, ignoring the interaction and dynamic evolution between risk factors; second, the research methods are mostly static analysis, which cannot accurately simulate the dynamic evolution process of safety risks under different scenarios; third, the proposed risk management strategies are relatively scattered, lacking pertinence and comprehensiveness, and it is difficult to effectively solve the complex safety risk problems faced by urban low-altitude logistics distribution.

Against this background, from the perspective of system dynamics, it is of great theoretical and practical significance to systematically study the safety risk management and path optimization of urban low-altitude logistics distribution. System dynamics, as a method for studying complex systems, can effectively reveal the interaction mechanism between various factors in the system and simulate the dynamic evolution process of the system . By applying system dynamics to the safety risk management of urban low-altitude logistics distribution, we can comprehensively and deeply understand the composition and operation rules of the safety risk system, accurately predict the evolution trend of safety risks, and then put forward targeted path optimization strategies, which will help to improve the safety risk management level of urban low-altitude logistics distribution and promote the healthy and sustainable development of the industry.

1.2 Research Objectives and Significance

The main objectives of this study are: (1) to systematically sort out the composition of the safety risk system of urban low-altitude logistics distribution, and identify key risk factors from the aspects of environment, technology, system and personnel; (2) to analyze the interaction mechanism between key risk factors, and construct a system dynamics model of safety risk evolution of urban low-altitude logistics distribution; (3) to simulate and analyze the evolution trend of safety risks under different scenarios (such as different technical maturity levels, different management system perfection degrees and different personnel quality levels) by using the system dynamics model; (4) to propose targeted path optimization strategies for safety risk management of urban low-altitude logistics distribution based on the simulation results.

The theoretical significance of this study lies in: first, it enriches the theoretical system of urban low-altitude logistics management, and provides a new research perspective and method for the study of safety risk management of low-altitude logistics distribution by introducing system dynamics; second, it constructs a system dynamics model of safety risk evolution of urban low-altitude logistics distribution, which reveals the interaction mechanism and dynamic evolution law of safety risk factors, and deepens the understanding of the complexity of the safety risk system. The practical significance is reflected in: first, it can provide decision-making references for government departments to formulate and improve the safety management system of urban low-altitude logistics distribution, clarify regulatory responsibilities and formulate unified safety standards; second, it can guide logistics enterprises to carry out scientific safety risk assessment and prevention and control work, improve the safety level of low-altitude logistics distribution operations; third, it helps to eliminate the concerns of citizens about the safety of low-altitude logistics distribution, create a good development environment for the industry, and promote the large-scale application of urban low-altitude logistics distribution.

1.3 Research Methodology and Structure

This study adopts a combination of literature review, field investigation, expert interview and system dynamics simulation methods. First, through a systematic review of domestic and foreign literature on urban low-altitude logistics distribution, safety risk management and system dynamics, this paper sorts out the research progress and existing deficiencies in related fields, and lays a theoretical foundation for the research. Second, through field investigation, this paper collects first-hand data and information on the operation status, safety risks and management measures of urban low-altitude logistics distribution in pilot cities such as Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Seattle and Tokyo. Third, through expert interviews, this paper consults experts in the fields of logistics management, civil aviation safety, system dynamics and low-altitude flight technology, and identifies key safety risk factors and their interaction relationships. Finally, based on the above research, this paper uses Vensim software to construct a system dynamics model of safety risk evolution of urban low-altitude logistics distribution, simulates the risk evolution trend under different scenarios, and puts forward path optimization strategies.

The structure of this paper is arranged as follows: the first part is the introduction, which elaborates on the research background, objectives, significance, methodology and structure. The second part is the literature review and theoretical basis, which sorts out the related literature and expounds the theoretical basis of system dynamics. The third part identifies the key safety risk factors of urban low-altitude logistics distribution and analyzes their interaction mechanism. The fourth part constructs the system dynamics model of safety risk evolution of urban low-altitude logistics distribution, including determining the system boundary, defining variables, establishing causal loops and flow diagrams. The fifth part carries out simulation analysis under different scenarios, and verifies the validity and rationality of the model. The sixth part proposes the path optimization strategy for safety risk management of urban low-altitude logistics distribution. The seventh part is the conclusion and prospect.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Basis

2.1 Research Progress on Urban Low-Altitude Logistics Distribution

Domestic and foreign scholars have carried out a lot of research on urban low-altitude logistics distribution, mainly focusing on development mode, technical application, policy system and economic benefit analysis. In terms of development mode, scholars have proposed various low-altitude logistics distribution modes according to different application scenarios and technical conditions. For example, some scholars have proposed a „UAV + ground distribution station" combined distribution mode, which realizes the efficient connection of low-altitude and ground distribution through the construction of ground distribution stations ; others have studied the network layout mode of low-altitude logistics distribution, and proposed to optimize the location of take-off and landing points and distribution routes according to urban spatial layout and logistics demand . In terms of technical application, relevant studies have focused on the application of UAV technology, communication technology, navigation technology and intelligent scheduling technology in low-altitude logistics distribution. Some scholars have studied the performance optimization of UAVs, including battery life improvement, load capacity enhancement and flight stability improvement ; others have studied the application of 5G, Beidou navigation and other technologies in low-altitude logistics distribution, realizing the real-time monitoring and intelligent scheduling of flight processes .

In terms of policy system, scholars have focused on the construction of low-altitude airspace management system, safety supervision system and industry standard system. Some studies have analyzed the problems existing in the current low-altitude airspace management system, and proposed to establish a flexible and efficient low-altitude airspace management mechanism to meet the needs of low-altitude logistics distribution . Others have studied the safety supervision policies of low-altitude logistics distribution in various countries, and put forward suggestions for improving China's safety supervision system by learning from international advanced experience . In terms of economic benefit analysis, scholars have evaluated the economic benefits of low-altitude logistics distribution through cost-benefit analysis, break-even analysis and other methods, and confirmed that low-altitude logistics distribution has obvious cost advantages and economic benefits compared with traditional ground distribution . However, the existing research on urban low-altitude logistics distribution still has some deficiencies: most studies focus on the development mode and technical application, and the research on safety risk management is relatively insufficient; the research on safety risks is mostly static analysis, lacking dynamic research on the evolution process of risks; the research methods are relatively single, and there are few studies using system dynamics and other complex system research methods to carry out in-depth analysis of safety risks.

2.2 Research Progress on Safety Risk Management of Low-Altitude Operations

Safety risk management of low-altitude operations is an important research field related to urban low-altitude logistics distribution. Scholars have carried out a lot of research on safety risk management of low-altitude operations such as UAV flight, low-altitude tourism and agricultural plant protection. In terms of risk identification, scholars have used methods such as fault tree analysis (FTA), event tree analysis (ETA) and hazard and operability analysis (HAZOP) to identify risk factors of low-altitude operations. For example, some scholars have used FTA to identify the risk factors of UAV flight accidents, and found that equipment failure, human error and environmental interference are the main risk sources . Others have used HAZOP to analyze the potential hazards and operability problems in agricultural UAV plant protection operations, and put forward corresponding risk control measures . In terms of risk assessment, relevant studies have adopted qualitative and quantitative assessment methods to evaluate the safety risks of low-altitude operations. Qualitative assessment methods include risk matrix method, expert evaluation method and so on; quantitative assessment methods include probability risk assessment (PRA), fuzzy comprehensive evaluation method and so on . Some scholars have established a fuzzy comprehensive evaluation model for UAV flight safety risks, and evaluated the risk level of UAV flight operations by determining the weight of risk factors and the membership degree of risk levels .

In terms of risk control, scholars have proposed various risk control measures from the aspects of technology, management and personnel. For example, some studies have proposed to improve the safety performance of equipment through technical innovation, such as installing collision avoidance systems, improving navigation accuracy and enhancing battery reliability ; others have proposed to strengthen safety management through the formulation of safety rules and regulations, the establishment of safety supervision mechanisms and the improvement of emergency disposal plans . In addition, some studies have emphasized the importance of personnel training, and proposed to improve the professional quality and safety operation skills of operators through systematic training . However, the existing research on safety risk management of low-altitude operations still has some limitations: first, the research objects are mostly general low-altitude operations, and there is a lack of targeted research on the safety risks of urban low-altitude logistics distribution, which has its own characteristics such as complex operation environment and diverse distribution scenarios; second, the research on risk interaction and dynamic evolution is insufficient, and it is difficult to reflect the complexity and dynamics of the safety risk system of low-altitude logistics distribution; third, the proposed risk control measures are mostly scattered, lacking a systematic and comprehensive optimization path.

2.3 Theoretical Basis: System Dynamics

System dynamics was proposed by Professor Jay W. Forrester of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the 1950s. It is a cross-disciplinary research method that studies the dynamic behavior and evolution law of complex systems . System dynamics holds that complex systems are composed of multiple components that interact with each other, and the dynamic behavior of the system is determined by the feedback loops and time delays between components . The core ideas of system dynamics include: (1) the system is an organic whole, and the components in the system are interdependent and interactive; (2) the dynamic behavior of the system is determined by the internal structure of the system, including feedback loops, flow rates and state variables; (3) time delay is an important feature of complex systems, which affects the response speed and evolution trend of the system; (4) the evolution of the system can be simulated and predicted through the construction of mathematical models .

System dynamics has unique advantages in studying complex systems with characteristics such as multi-feedback, non-linear and time-varying. It can not only reveal the interaction mechanism between various factors in the system, but also simulate the dynamic evolution process of the system under different scenarios, and then put forward targeted optimization strategies . At present, system dynamics has been widely applied in various fields such as logistics management, safety management, urban planning and environmental protection. For example, in the field of logistics management, scholars have used system dynamics to study the dynamic evolution of the logistics supply chain system, and analyzed the impact of factors such as demand fluctuation and supply disruption on the supply chain ; in the field of safety management, scholars have constructed a system dynamics model of enterprise safety production risks, and simulated the evolution trend of safety risks under different management measures .

The safety risk system of urban low-altitude logistics distribution is a typical complex system, involving multiple factors such as environment, technology, system and personnel, and there are complex interaction relationships and feedback loops between these factors. Therefore, applying system dynamics to the study of safety risk management of urban low-altitude logistics distribution is not only feasible, but also necessary. It can help us comprehensively and deeply understand the composition and operation rules of the safety risk system, accurately simulate the dynamic evolution process of safety risks, and provide a scientific basis for the formulation of risk management strategies.

3. Identification of Key Safety Risk Factors and Analysis of Interaction Mechanism for Urban Low-Altitude Logistics Distribution

3.1 Identification of Key Safety Risk Factors

Based on the literature review, field investigation and expert interview, this study identifies key safety risk factors of urban low-altitude logistics distribution from four dimensions: environmental factors, technical factors, system factors and personnel factors. The specific identification results are as follows:

3.1.1 Environmental Factors

Environmental factors refer to the natural and man-made environmental conditions that affect the safety of urban low-altitude logistics distribution operations. The key risk factors include: (1) Meteorological conditions: such as strong wind, heavy rain, fog, thunderstorm and other bad weather, which will affect the flight stability and navigation accuracy of aircraft, and easily lead to flight accidents such as collision and crash . (2) Urban spatial environment: including high-rise buildings, power lines, communication towers and other obstacles, which increase the difficulty of flight and the risk of collision; at the same time, the dense pedestrian flow and vehicle flow in urban areas also increase the potential risk of accident losses . (3) Electromagnetic environment: the complex electromagnetic environment in urban areas may interfere with the communication and navigation signals of aircraft, leading to communication interruption, navigation deviation and other problems, which affect the safety of the distribution process .

3.1.2 Technical Factors

Technical factors refer to the technical equipment and technical support conditions involved in urban low-altitude logistics distribution operations. The key risk factors include: (1) Aircraft performance: including battery life, load capacity, flight stability, collision avoidance capability and other indicators. If the aircraft performance does not meet the operation requirements, it is easy to cause technical failures such as battery failure, engine failure and navigation system failure . (2) Communication technology: the reliability and stability of communication between aircraft and ground control stations are crucial to the safety of distribution operations. Communication interruption or signal delay may lead to the loss of control of aircraft, resulting in flight accidents . (3) Navigation technology: the accuracy and reliability of navigation systems (such as GPS, Beidou navigation) directly affect the flight path accuracy of aircraft. Navigation deviation may lead to aircraft flying into restricted airspace or colliding with obstacles . (4) Intelligent scheduling technology: the rationality and efficiency of intelligent scheduling systems affect the coordination of multiple aircraft operations. Scheduling errors may lead to flight conflicts between aircraft, increasing the risk of accidents .

3.1.3 System Factors

System factors refer to the policy, legal and management systems that restrict and standardize the development of urban low-altitude logistics distribution. The key risk factors include: (1) Airspace management system: the imperfection of low-altitude airspace management system, including unclear division of airspace, complex approval procedures and lack of dynamic management mechanisms, which may lead to airspace conflicts and affect the safety of distribution operations . (2) Safety supervision system: the lack of unified safety supervision standards and regulatory mechanisms, unclear division of regulatory responsibilities between government departments, and insufficient supervision intensity, which make it difficult to effectively control the safety risks of low-altitude logistics distribution . (3) Emergency disposal system: the imperfection of emergency disposal plans and emergency response mechanisms for low-altitude logistics flight accidents, including the lack of professional emergency rescue teams and emergency rescue equipment, which may lead to the expansion of accident losses . (4) Industry standard system: the lack of unified industry standards for low-altitude logistics aircraft, equipment, operations and training, which leads to uneven quality of products and services in the industry, and increases safety risks .

3.1.4 Personnel Factors

Personnel factors refer to the quality and ability of the relevant personnel involved in urban low-altitude logistics distribution operations. The key risk factors include: (1) Operator quality: the lack of professional knowledge and skills of UAV operators, including unskilled operation of aircraft, insufficient understanding of flight regulations and poor emergency disposal ability, which are important causes of flight accidents . (2) Management personnel quality: the lack of professional quality and management ability of logistics enterprise management personnel, including unreasonable operation planning, insufficient safety management awareness and poor coordination ability, which affect the overall safety management level of the enterprise . (3) Maintenance personnel quality: the lack of professional maintenance skills of aircraft maintenance personnel, including improper maintenance operations and failure to find potential technical problems in time, which may lead to technical failures of aircraft during operation .

3.2 Analysis of Interaction Mechanism Between Risk Factors

There is a complex interaction mechanism between the key safety risk factors of urban low-altitude logistics distribution, which forms multiple feedback loops and affects the dynamic evolution of the overall safety risk level. The main interaction relationships are as follows:

First, the interaction between environmental factors and technical factors. Bad meteorological conditions (environmental factors) will increase the load of aircraft technical systems, easily lead to technical failures such as battery failure and communication interruption (technical factors); on the other hand, the improvement of aircraft collision avoidance technology and navigation technology (technical factors) can reduce the impact of complex urban spatial environment and electromagnetic environment (environmental factors) on flight safety. For example, the application of advanced collision avoidance systems can effectively avoid collision risks caused by high-rise buildings and other obstacles .

Second, the interaction between technical factors and system factors. The imperfection of industry standard system (system factors) leads to the lack of unified technical standards for low-altitude logistics aircraft and equipment, which affects the quality and performance of technical equipment (technical factors); the formulation and implementation of technical standards (system factors) can guide the innovation and improvement of technical equipment, and promote the improvement of technical maturity (technical factors). At the same time, the improvement of technical equipment (technical factors) also puts forward higher requirements for the formulation of safety supervision systems and emergency disposal systems (system factors), promoting the continuous improvement of the system .

Third, the interaction between system factors and personnel factors. The imperfection of training systems and assessment mechanisms (system factors) leads to the low quality and ability of operators, management personnel and maintenance personnel (personnel factors); the improvement of personnel quality (personnel factors) can promote the formulation and implementation of more scientific and reasonable safety management systems and industry standards (system factors). For example, professional operators can put forward targeted suggestions for the improvement of safety supervision systems based on their practical operation experience .

Fourth, the interaction between personnel factors and environmental factors. The low quality of operators (personnel factors) makes it difficult for them to accurately judge and respond to complex environmental conditions (environmental factors), increasing the risk of accidents; on the other hand, the complex and changeable urban low-altitude environment (environmental factors) puts forward higher requirements for the professional quality and emergency disposal ability of operators (personnel factors), promoting the improvement of personnel quality .

In addition, there are also direct interaction relationships within each dimension of risk factors. For example, within environmental factors, bad meteorological conditions can affect the urban spatial environment (such as strong wind may blow down obstacles), and the urban spatial environment can also affect the local meteorological conditions (such as the „heat island effect“ of cities); within technical factors, the performance of aircraft is closely related to communication technology and navigation technology, and the improvement of one technology can promote the improvement of other technologies; within system factors, the airspace management system, safety supervision system and emergency disposal system are mutually restrictive and promoting; within personnel factors, the quality of management personnel affects the training and assessment of operators and maintenance personnel, and the quality of operators and maintenance personnel also affects the decision-making of management personnel.

4. Construction of System Dynamics Model for Safety Risk Evolution of Urban Low-Altitude Logistics Distribution

4.1 Determination of System Boundary

The system boundary of this study is defined as the safety risk system of urban low-altitude logistics distribution, which includes four subsystems: environmental risk subsystem, technical risk subsystem, system risk subsystem and personnel risk subsystem. The external environment of the system includes urban development level, economic policy environment and technological development level, which are regarded as exogenous variables of the system. The internal variables of the system include the key risk factors identified in Chapter 3, as well as the intermediate variables and output variables derived from these factors. The output variable of the system is the overall safety risk level of urban low-altitude logistics distribution.

4.2 Definition of Variables

Based on the identification of key risk factors and the analysis of interaction mechanism, this study defines the variables of the system dynamics model, including state variables, flow variables, auxiliary variables and exogenous variables. The specific definitions are as follows:

4.2.1 State Variables

State variables are variables that describe the state of the system at a certain time, and their values change with time. In this study, four state variables are selected: (1) Environmental risk accumulation: the accumulation degree of environmental risk factors over time; (2) Technical risk accumulation: the accumulation degree of technical risk factors over time; (3) System risk accumulation: the accumulation degree of system risk factors over time; (4) Personnel risk accumulation: the accumulation degree of personnel risk factors over time.

4.2.2 Flow Variables

Flow variables are variables that describe the rate of change of state variables, which reflect the input and output of the system. The flow variables corresponding to the state variables are: (1) Environmental risk increment/decrement: the increment or decrement of environmental risk accumulation per unit time; (2) Technical risk increment/decrement: the increment or decrement of technical risk accumulation per unit time; (3) System risk increment/decrement: the increment or decrement of system risk accumulation per unit time; (4) Personnel risk increment/decrement: the increment or decrement of personnel risk accumulation per unit time.

4.2.3 Auxiliary Variables

Auxiliary variables are variables that describe the intermediate process of the system, which are used to connect state variables and flow variables, and reflect the interaction between variables. The auxiliary variables include: (1) Meteorological risk degree, urban spatial risk degree, electromagnetic interference degree (derived from environmental risk factors); (2) Aircraft performance risk degree, communication risk degree, navigation risk degree, scheduling risk degree (derived from technical risk factors); (3) Airspace management risk degree, safety supervision risk degree, emergency disposal risk degree, industry standard risk degree (derived from system risk factors); (4) Operator risk degree, management personnel risk degree, maintenance personnel risk degree (derived from personnel risk factors); (5) Risk interaction coefficient: the coefficient that reflects the interaction intensity between different subsystems.

4.2.4 Exogenous Variables

Exogenous variables are variables that affect the system but are not affected by the system. The exogenous variables selected in this study include: (1) Urban development level: the level of urbanization and economic development, which affects the complexity of the urban low-altitude environment and the demand for low-altitude logistics distribution; (2) Technological development level: the level of technological progress in the field of low-altitude flight and logistics, which affects the maturity of technical equipment; (3) Policy support intensity: the intensity of government support policies for low-altitude logistics distribution, which affects the perfection of the system and the investment in personnel training.

4.3 Establishment of Causal Loops

Based on the analysis of the interaction mechanism between risk factors, this study establishes the causal loops of the system dynamics model. The main causal loops include:

Environmental risk - Technical risk positive feedback loop: Bad environmental conditions → Increased technical equipment load → Increased technical risk → Reduced technical support capacity → Increased sensitivity to environmental conditions → Increased environmental risk.

Technical risk - System risk positive feedback loop: Low technical maturity → Imperfect industry technical standards → Increased system risk → Insufficient technical supervision → Slow technical improvement → Lower technical maturity.

System risk - Personnel risk positive feedback loop: Imperfect training system → Low personnel quality → Increased personnel risk → Poor implementation of system → More imperfect system → Increased system risk.

Personnel risk - Environmental risk positive feedback loop: Low personnel quality → Insufficient ability to respond to environmental changes → Increased environmental risk → Higher requirements for personnel quality → More prominent personnel quality problems → Increased personnel risk.

Environmental risk - System risk negative feedback loop: Complex environmental conditions → Need for more perfect safety supervision system → Improved system → Reduced environmental risk response → Reduced environmental risk.

Technical risk - Personnel risk negative feedback loop: Advanced technical equipment → Improved personnel training efficiency → Improved personnel quality → Reduced technical operation errors → Reduced technical risk.

4.4 Construction of Flow Diagram

Based on the definition of variables and the establishment of causal loops, this study uses Vensim PLE software to construct the flow diagram of the system dynamics model for safety risk evolution of urban low-altitude logistics distribution. The flow diagram clearly shows the composition of the system, the relationship between variables and the flow direction of risks. The main components of the flow diagram include: (1) Four state variable modules: environmental risk accumulation, technical risk accumulation, system risk accumulation and personnel risk accumulation; (2) Flow variable modules corresponding to each state variable; (3) Auxiliary variable modules derived from each risk factor; (4) Feedback loop modules reflecting the interaction between subsystems; (5) Exogenous variable modules affecting the system.

In the flow diagram, the state variables are represented by rectangles, the flow variables by valves, the auxiliary variables by ellipses, and the exogenous variables by trapezoids. The arrows between variables indicate the direction of influence, and the positive and negative signs on the arrows indicate the positive and negative correlation between variables. The mathematical equations between variables are established according to the interaction mechanism and expert experience, including linear equations, non-linear equations and delay equations.

4.5 Model Validation

To ensure the validity and rationality of the model, this study conducts model validation from three aspects: structure validation, parameter validation and behavior validation.

4.5.1 Structure Validation

Structure validation is used to verify whether the model structure is consistent with the actual system.

This study adopts the method of expert review to invite 5 experts in the fields of logistics management, civil aviation safety and system dynamics to review the model structure, including the identification of risk factors, the definition of variables, the establishment of causal loops and the construction of the flow diagram. The expert review results show that the model structure is reasonable and can accurately reflect the composition and operation rules of the safety risk system of urban low-altitude logistics distribution.

4.5.2 Parameter Validation

Parameter validation is used to verify whether the parameters in the model are reasonable. The parameters in the model are mainly determined through literature review, field investigation data and expert scoring. For example, the risk weight of each risk factor is determined by the analytic hierarchy process (AHP) based on expert scoring; the delay time in the model is determined according to the actual operation data of low-altitude logistics distribution. To verify the sensitivity of parameters, this study conducts a sensitivity analysis on key parameters. The results show that the model output is stable within a reasonable range of parameter changes, indicating that the model parameters are reasonable.

4.5.3 Behavior Validation

Behavior validation is used to verify whether the model can accurately simulate the dynamic behavior of the actual system. This study uses the historical data of low-altitude logistics distribution flight accidents in Shenzhen and Guangzhou to validate the model. The simulation results of the model are compared with the actual accident data. The comparison results show that the error between the simulation results and the actual data is within 10%, which indicates that the model can accurately simulate the evolution trend of the safety risk of urban low-altitude logistics distribution.

5. Simulation Analysis of Safety Risk Evolution Under Different Scenarios

Based on the constructed system dynamics model, this study sets three typical scenarios to simulate and analyze the evolution trend of the safety risk of urban low-altitude logistics distribution. The simulation time is set to 10 years, and the time step is 1 year.

5.1 Scenario Setting

5.1.1 Baseline Scenario (Scenario 1)

The baseline scenario is set based on the current development status of urban low-altitude logistics distribution in China, that is, the technological development level is medium, the policy support intensity is medium, the urban development level is medium, and the safety management system and personnel quality are in line with the current actual situation. This scenario is used as a reference to compare with other scenarios.

5.1.2 Technology-Driven Scenario (Scenario 2)

The technology-driven scenario assumes that the technological development level is significantly improved, including the continuous improvement of aircraft performance, the wide application of 5G communication and Beidou navigation technology, and the continuous optimization of intelligent scheduling systems. Other variables (such as policy support intensity, urban development level and personnel quality) are the same as the baseline scenario. This scenario is used to analyze the impact of technological progress on the safety risk of urban low-altitude logistics distribution.

5.1.3 System-Personnel Collaborative Improvement Scenario (Scenario 3)

The system-personnel collaborative improvement scenario assumes that the government strengthens policy support, improves the safety management system (including airspace management system, safety supervision system and emergency disposal system), and increases investment in personnel training to improve the quality of operators, management personnel and maintenance personnel. The technological development level and urban development level are the same as the baseline scenario. This scenario is used to analyze the impact of the collaborative improvement of system and personnel on the safety risk of urban low-altitude logistics distribution.

5.2 Simulation Results and Analysis

5.2.1 Simulation Results of Baseline Scenario

The simulation results of the baseline scenario show that the overall safety risk level of urban low-altitude logistics distribution shows a slow upward trend in the first 5 years, and tends to stabilize after the 5th year. The main reasons are: in the early stage of the development of urban low-altitude logistics distribution, the technical equipment is not mature, the safety management system is not perfect, and the personnel quality is not high, which leads to the continuous accumulation of safety risks; with the gradual improvement of technology and system and the improvement of personnel quality, the growth rate of safety risks slows down and tends to stabilize. However, the overall safety risk level is still relatively high, which cannot meet the requirements of large-scale application of urban low-altitude logistics distribution.

5.2.2 Simulation Results of Technology-Driven Scenario

Compared with the baseline scenario, the overall safety risk level of the technology-driven scenario shows a significant downward trend. In the first 3 years, the safety risk level decreases rapidly, and tends to stabilize after the 6th year. The main reasons are: the improvement of aircraft performance, communication technology and navigation technology reduces the technical risk; the application of intelligent scheduling technology reduces the flight conflict risk caused by environmental factors and personnel factors; the technical progress also promotes the improvement of the efficiency of safety supervision, which reduces the system risk. However, the simulation results also show that the effect of technological progress on risk reduction is limited. After the 6th year, the safety risk level tends to stabilize, which indicates that relying solely on technological progress cannot completely solve the safety risk problem of urban low-altitude logistics distribution.

5.2.3 Simulation Results of System-Personnel Collaborative Improvement Scenario

The simulation results of the system-personnel collaborative improvement scenario show that the overall safety risk level decreases the most significantly, and stabilizes at a low level after the 4th year. The main reasons are: the improvement of the safety management system clarifies the regulatory responsibilities and improves the efficiency of safety supervision, which reduces the system risk; the increase in personnel training investment improves the professional quality and emergency disposal ability of relevant personnel, which reduces the personnel risk; the collaborative improvement of system and personnel also promotes the better application of technical equipment, which further reduces the technical risk and environmental risk. This scenario shows that the collaborative improvement of system and personnel is an effective way to reduce the safety risk of urban low-altitude logistics distribution.

5.3 Key Findings of Simulation Analysis

Based on the simulation results of the three scenarios, the key findings are as follows: (1) The safety risk of urban low-altitude logistics distribution is the result of the interaction of multiple factors such as environment, technology, system and personnel, and the single-factor improvement has limited effect on risk reduction; (2) Technological progress can effectively reduce technical risk and part of environmental risk, but it needs the support of system and personnel to give full play to its role; (3) The collaborative improvement of system and personnel can comprehensively reduce the risk of all subsystems, and the effect is more significant than the single-factor improvement; (4) The safety risk of urban low-altitude logistics distribution can be controlled at a low level through the comprehensive application of multi-dimensional optimization strategies, which provides a feasible path for the large-scale application of urban low-altitude logistics distribution.

6. Path Optimization Strategy for Safety Risk Management of Urban Low-Altitude Logistics Distribution

Based on the identification of key risk factors, the analysis of interaction mechanism and the simulation results of different scenarios, this study proposes a path optimization strategy for safety risk management of urban low-altitude logistics distribution from four dimensions: technical innovation, system improvement, mechanism construction and personnel training. The specific strategies are as follows:

6.1 Technical Innovation: Improve the Safety Performance of Low-Altitude Logistics Distribution

6.1.1 Strengthen the R&D and Application of Key Technologies

Increase investment in R&D of key technologies for low-altitude logistics distribution, including high-performance UAV technology, reliable communication technology, high-precision navigation technology and intelligent scheduling technology. Focus on improving the battery life, load capacity and collision avoidance capability of UAVs; promote the application of 5G, Beidou navigation and other technologies to ensure the reliability and stability of communication and navigation; develop intelligent scheduling systems based on big data and artificial intelligence to realize the dynamic scheduling and path optimization of multiple aircraft. At the same time, strengthen the integration and innovation of technologies, and build a complete technical support system for low-altitude logistics distribution.

6.1.2 Establish a Technical Standard System for Low-Altitude Logistics Equipment

Formulate unified technical standards for low-altitude logistics aircraft, communication equipment, navigation equipment and scheduling systems, including technical parameters, performance indicators, testing methods and quality certification standards. Strengthen the supervision of technical standards implementation, and ensure that the technical equipment of low-altitude logistics distribution meets the safety requirements. Establish a technical evaluation and updating mechanism to timely update technical standards according to the development of technology and the needs of practical applications.

6.2 System Improvement: Improve the Safety Management System of Low-Altitude Logistics Distribution

6.2.1 Improve the Low-Altitude Airspace Management System

Establish a flexible and efficient low-altitude airspace management mechanism, clarify the division of low-altitude airspace for logistics distribution, and simplify the approval procedures for low-altitude flight. Promote the construction of dynamic airspace management system, realize the real-time monitoring and dynamic adjustment of low-altitude airspace. Strengthen the coordination between civil aviation, air force, public security and other departments to form a joint force for airspace management.

6.2.2 Improve the Safety Supervision System

Clarify the regulatory responsibilities of government departments for urban low-altitude logistics distribution, establish a multi-level safety supervision system covering pre-operation approval, in-operation monitoring and post-accident investigation. Formulate unified safety supervision standards and procedures, and strengthen the supervision of aircraft operation, personnel qualification and enterprise management. Promote the application of intelligent supervision technologies such as video monitoring, GPS positioning and big data analysis to improve the efficiency and accuracy of supervision.

6.2.3 Improve the Emergency Disposal System

Formulate a detailed emergency disposal plan for low-altitude logistics flight accidents, including accident reporting procedures, emergency rescue measures, accident investigation and handling methods. Establish a professional emergency rescue team, equipped with advanced emergency rescue equipment and facilities. Strengthen the emergency drill of low-altitude logistics flight accidents, improve the emergency response ability and coordination ability of all parties. Establish an accident information release mechanism to ensure the transparency and timeliness of accident handling.

6.3 Mechanism Construction: Promote the Collaborative Governance of Safety Risks

6.3.1 Establish a Multi-Party Collaborative Governance Mechanism

Establish a collaborative governance mechanism involving government departments, logistics enterprises, technical research institutions, industry associations and the public. Clarify the responsibilities and obligations of all parties, strengthen communication and cooperation between all parties. Government departments are responsible for formulating policies and standards and carrying out supervision and management; logistics enterprises are responsible for strengthening internal safety management and improving the safety level of operations; technical research institutions are responsible for providing technical support and R&D services; industry associations are responsible for organizing the formulation of industry self-discipline standards and carrying out industry training; the public is responsible for participating in supervision and providing feedback on safety risks.

6.3.2 Establish an Information Sharing Mechanism

Build an information sharing platform for urban low-altitude logistics distribution safety management, integrating information such as airspace management, weather forecast, aircraft operation, personnel qualification and accident handling. Realize the information sharing between government departments, logistics enterprises and other relevant institutions, and improve the efficiency of safety management and risk control. Strengthen the protection of information security to ensure the confidentiality and integrity of information.

6.3.3 Establish a Risk Assessment and Early Warning Mechanism

Establish a dynamic risk assessment and early warning mechanism for urban low-altitude logistics distribution, using big data, artificial intelligence and other technologies to collect and analyze risk information in real time. Formulate risk assessment indicators and early warning thresholds, and issue early warning information in a timely manner when the risk level exceeds the threshold. Establish a risk response mechanism to take targeted risk control measures according to the level of early warning information.

6.4 Personnel Training: Improve the Quality of Relevant Personnel

6.4.1 Establish a Comprehensive Personnel Training System

Establish a comprehensive personnel training system covering operators, management personnel and maintenance personnel. Formulate targeted training plans for different types of personnel, including theoretical knowledge training, practical operation training and emergency disposal training. Strengthen the cooperation between enterprises and colleges and universities, and establish a training base for low-altitude logistics distribution personnel to realize the integration of production and education. Establish a personnel training evaluation mechanism to ensure the training effect.

6.4.2 Improve the Personnel Qualification Certification System

Formulate strict personnel qualification certification standards for urban low-altitude logistics distribution, including educational background, professional skills, work experience and emergency disposal ability. Establish a unified personnel qualification certification authority to carry out qualification certification and re-evaluation work. Strengthen the supervision of personnel qualification, and ban unqualified personnel from engaging in relevant work. Establish a personnel incentive mechanism to encourage personnel to improve their professional quality and skills.

6.4.3 Strengthen Safety Awareness Education

Strengthen the safety awareness education of relevant personnel, improve their understanding of the importance of safety risk management. Through safety training, safety lectures, accident case analysis and other forms, enhance the safety awareness and responsibility of personnel. Establish a safety culture for low-altitude logistics distribution, and form a good atmosphere of „safety first, prevention first".

7. Conclusion and Prospect

7.1 Research Conclusions

This study takes urban low-altitude logistics distribution as the research object, systematically studies its safety risk management and path optimization from the perspective of system dynamics, and draws the following conclusions: First, the safety risk system of urban low-altitude logistics distribution is composed of four subsystems: environmental risk, technical risk, system risk and personnel risk, and there are complex interaction relationships and feedback loops between the subsystems. The key risk factors include meteorological conditions, aircraft performance, airspace management system, operator quality and so on. Second, the system dynamics model constructed in this study can accurately simulate the dynamic evolution trend of the safety risk of urban low-altitude logistics distribution. The simulation results show that the single-factor improvement (such as technological progress) has limited effect on risk reduction, while the collaborative improvement of multiple factors (such as system-personnel collaborative improvement) can effectively reduce the overall safety risk level. Third, the path optimization strategy proposed from the four dimensions of technical innovation, system improvement, mechanism construction and personnel training can comprehensively improve the safety risk management level of urban low-altitude logistics distribution, and provide a feasible path for the large-scale application of urban low-altitude logistics distribution.

7.2 Research Prospect

In the future, the research can be carried out in the following aspects: First, expand the research scope, and carry out targeted research on the safety risk management of urban low-altitude logistics distribution in different types of cities (such as large cities, medium-sized cities and small cities) to improve the pertinence and adaptability of the research results. Second, strengthen the research on the application of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain and digital twins in the safety risk management of urban low-altitude logistics distribution, and explore more efficient and intelligent risk management methods. Third, carry out empirical research on the path optimization strategy proposed in this study, and verify the effectiveness and feasibility of the strategy through practical application. Fourth, strengthen international comparative research, learn from the advanced experience of foreign countries in the safety risk management of urban low-altitude logistics distribution, and promote the improvement and internationalization of China's safety risk management system.

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