



How to Investigate an Incident

The purpose of an investigation is not to find fault or lay blame, but rather to identify the basic causes of incidents so that controls can be put in place to prevent further occurrences. Information from the investigation should be put on the record, but not used to discipline anyone. This policy encourages witnesses to tell investigators everything they know.

Prevention is the purpose of an investigation. An incident investigation should accomplish the following objectives:

1. Determine what actually happened
2. Determine the cause or causes of the incident
3. Identify any unsafe conditions, acts or procedures
4. Help management to identify practical corrective actions
5. Determine whether due diligence was observed
6. Show the commitment of management that an adequate investigation system is in place

How to Determine the Incident Causation

Incidents usually result from unsafe acts and conditions. These unsafe acts and conditions can arise from:

1. Unsafe Conditions
2. Improper Procedures
3. Poor Training
4. Disregard for Procedures

If you can determine which of these four events occurred you will be able to determine the root cause of the incident and that will allow you to develop a plan to reduce or eliminate similar incidents in the future.

Successful Incident Interview

The fundamentals of basic interviewing techniques follow the 5 Ws: Who, What, When, Where and Why. Add to that a line of questioning to assess How and finally record the incident scene with Photos. Ask the interviewee to describe what happened by answering these questions.

1. **WHO:** Who was involved? In addition to the victim, identify any witnesses. Determine the role of each person as relates to the event and the incident.
2. **WHAT:** Identify exactly what happened, step-by-step. You should carefully interview each witness, separately so as to not unduly influence ones response.
3. **WHEN:** Identify exactly when the incident happened. What was the exact time-of-

day? If outside identify the weather conditions, if inside lighting, etc.

4. **WHERE:** Provide exact details as to location. Where there any hazardous conditions present? Were there elements of the environment that might have contributed to the accident or delayed emergency response?
5. **WHY:** Identify the causal elements that connect to the incident. Was there a lack of safety training? Were individuals acting in a manner that was beyond their level of training or experience? Were they wearing prescribed safety apparel? Were there other factors, including other persons that might have contributed to the incident?
6. **HOW:** Ask questions to identify how the incident happened and how it might have been prevented. Were all involved parties following policies and procedures? How was the emergency response initiated? Did it operate quickly and smoothly, according to Plan?
7. **PHOTOS:** Take photos of the site of the incident, from several different perspectives. Identify any conditions that might have contributed to the incident and photograph that area.

Top 10 Interview Questions

1. Demographics: What are your name, address, and phone number? What is your duty station and position? What is your technical background or set of skills? How are you connected with others involved in the accident?
2. When did you see the accident happen?
3. What attracted your attention to the accident?
4. When you first saw the accident, where was the vehicle or equipment? Where was the individual involved in the accident?
5. What was the direction of travel of the equipment involved in the accident? Where was the final resting place of the equipment? (Have the witness draw a diagram, if appropriate.)
6. Were any other witnesses around? Do you know the names of other witnesses?
7. Do you wear glasses or other corrective lenses? Do you wear a hearing aid? What type? Were you wearing your glasses or hearing aid?
8. Was proper personal protective equipment in use in connection with the task being performed? Exactly what personal protective wear was being used? Did the victim's underlying clothing in any way contribute to the incident/accident or fail to protect them from injury?
9. Are there are Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's) that are published for the work being performed? Were being followed for all persons involved?
10. Were persons performing the task(s) properly trained and properly supervised?

Good investigation practices will help develop better procedures and safety guidelines and can significantly reduce the chance of litigation or strengthen the institution's defense when litigation does occur.