

Incident investigation - hints, tips and reminders

Why investigate?

Remember it's not about pointing the finger. You are gathering information and looking at the underlying causes of the incident so you can try and stop it happening again.

Practicalities:

Before you leave the office



Think about what relevant information you may already have to hand that might help you in your investigation eg a risk assessment, local rules. Spending 5 minutes reviewing this may help suggest questions to ask when you arrive.

You will probably remember to take a notebook and pen but what about a camera and a tape-measure too? And don't forget, you can ask for help from Safety Services at any point.

Arriving on scene

If you are able, get to the scene of the incident as quickly as possible. You may need to stop work and prevent access to the area, although First Aiders (or the Emergency Services) should be allowed in to treat any injuries, deal with fire etc.

Make the area safe eg by cutting power to moving equipment, but try to preserve the scene so you are able to collect physical evidence. If you are not able to visit immediately, then ask those on scene to take pictures, especially before they clean up any spills etc. Also ask them to note the names of those involved including any witness before they leave the area. And don't forget to report the incident via SafetyNET if it hasn't been done already.

Conducting interviews

At some point during the investigation you will need to speak to those involved to gather information – you may carry out informal interviews at the scene but you should sit down with all those involved after the incident so that you can review this information, fill any gaps and find out more.

When you conduct an interview, especially with those who may not have been directly involved at the time, eg a manager or supervisor, you should make clear what is happening and the purpose of the investigation. Tell them who you are and which incident you are investigating and why. You should also:



- Remind them of the details of the incident and why you need to speak to them eg as a witness or the supervisor of someone who was injured.
- Give an indication of how long the interview might take, and offer to revisit/come back another time if needed.
- Make it clear that this is not about establishing blame but that you are looking at the underlying causes of the incident to find out what could be done to stop it happening again.
- If possible, indicate how long the investigation process might take and what will happen with your findings eg you will be reporting back to the Head of Department.

If you are not comfortable with interviewing close colleagues or senior managers, you may want to ask a colleague to help or else contact Safety Services for their input.

Techniques:

Asking the right question



There are lots of different ways of asking questions when carrying out an investigation. Kipling wrote:

*I keep six honest serving men
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who*

Try to use these open questions as this prompts the person you are interviewing to give you a longer/more detailed response: So ask *Tell me WHAT happened/WHEN that happened/WHERE that happened/HOW that happened/WHO was there.*

You can use other methods of questioning along with open questions to clarify or probe for further details. For example, use closed questions which prompt an either/or type response eg yes/no, black/white to confirm or clarify a fact. Using funnelling questions will help you find out more detail by asking a series of questions around a particular theme, building on the information given in the responses given eg to find out more about the equipment that was involved in the incident.

Try not to ask leading questions – these can subtly prompt the responder to answer in a particular way:

So ask - *How fast was each car going when the accident happened?* Instead of *How fast was the red car going when it smashed into the blue car?*

And don't make assumptions or fill gaps – you may be familiar with the work and the people you are interviewing but they should tell you what happened/what they did – don't assume they followed the accepted procedures or carried out the task in the way you would have expected.

Analysing the causes of incidents

Remember that the incident you are investigating is likely to have been caused by a number of factors, causes and sub-causes with a certain combination of these having given rise to the incident itself.

To make sure that you cover all these factors when you investigate both when gathering and analyzing the information, use the **4Ps** (below) to organise both your questions and analysis of the information gathered.

