

Fact sheet – Investigation Basics

Introduction

Accident and incidents regardless of cause bear a heavy cost, both financial and importantly in personal terms. Even where an incident does not have high human cost, it can still leave psychological challenges; all of which are contra to good leadership....and ultimately, they hurt your bottom line too.

An investigation is the best structured way to ‘deep dive’ and find the cause and any underlying issues to prevent recurrence. In engineering we might have to investigate for three principle reasons:

- ❖ Technical reasons, such as a derailment
- ❖ Health and Safety, such as slips trips and falls
- ❖ Performance or misconduct

The outline principles are identical

Why investigate

There are hazards in all workplaces; risk control measures are put in place to reduce the risks to an acceptable level to prevent accidents and cases of ill health. The fact that an adverse event has occurred suggests that the existing risk control measures were inadequate.

Learning lessons from near misses can prevent costly accidents. (The Clapham Junction rail crash and the Herald of Free Enterprise ferry capsized were both examples of situations where management had failed to recognise, and act on, previous failings in the system.) You need to investigate adverse events for a number of reasons.



Legal reasons for investigating:

- ❖ To ensure you are operating your organisation within the law.
- ❖ The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, regulation 5, requires employers to plan, organise, control, monitor and review their health and safety arrangements. Health and safety investigations form an essential part of this process.
- ❖ Following the Woolf Report on civil action, you are expected to make full disclosure of the circumstances of an accident to the injured parties considering legal action. Your investigation findings will also provide essential information for your insurers in the event of a claim.

Information and insights gained from an investigation:

- ❖ An understanding of how and why things went wrong
- ❖ An understanding of the ways people can be exposed to substances or conditions that may affect their health.

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- ❖ A true snapshot of what really happens and how work is really done. (Workers may find short cuts to make their work easier or quicker and may ignore rules. You need to be aware of this.)
- ❖ Identifying deficiencies in your risk control management, which will enable you to improve your management of risk in the future and to learn lessons which will be applicable to other parts of your organisation.

Benefits arising from an investigation:

- ❖ The prevention of further similar adverse events. If there is a serious accident, the regulatory authorities will take a firm line if you have ignored previous warnings.
- ❖ The prevention of business losses due to disruption, stoppage, lost orders and the costs of criminal and civil legal actions.
- ❖ An improvement in employee morale and attitude towards health and safety. Employees will be more cooperative in implementing new safety precautions if they were involved in the decision and they can see that problems are dealt with
- ❖ The development of managerial skills which can be readily applied to other areas of the organisation.



Investigators

Should be the line manager or certainly a manager that understands the circumstances, is independent and can act with authority. Using support expertise as required. Good investigators will be:

- ❖ Experienced, credible and respected
- ❖ Perceptive and good at information gathering
- ❖ Interviewing skilled
- ❖ Strong analysts
- ❖ Unbiased
- ❖ Detailed and determined
- ❖ Deep probing
- ❖ Patient and honest