



FACT SHEET

Incident Investigations

Management and Staff can use this fact sheet as a guide Policy CH15-022 Workplace Staff Hazards and Incidents – Reporting, Investigation and Documentation

When incidents, hazards or concerns are investigated, the emphasis should be concentrated on finding the **root cause(s)** of so you can prevent it from happening again. The purpose is to find facts that can lead to actions, not to find fault. Always look for deeper causes. Do not simply record the steps of the event.

Reasons to investigate a workplace incident, hazard or concern include:

- most importantly, to find out the root cause(s) and to prevent similar accidents in the future
- to fulfill any legal requirements
- to determine compliance with applicable safety regulations
- to process workers' compensation claims

Incidents that involve no injury or property damage should still be investigated to determine the hazards that should be corrected.

The immediate manager or supervisor is responsible to complete the investigation. The advantage is that this person is likely to know most about the work and persons involved and the current conditions. Furthermore, the manager or supervisor can usually take immediate remedial action.

An important point for performing investigations is that even in the most seemingly straightforward incidents, **seldom, if ever, is there only a single cause.**

For example, an "investigation" which concludes that an accident was due to worker carelessness, and goes no further, fails to seek answers to several important questions such as:

- Was the worker distracted? If yes, why was the worker distracted?
- Was a safe work procedure being followed? If not, why not?
- Were safety devices in order? If not, why not?
- Was the worker trained? If not, why not?
- If equipment was involved, is there a defect in the equipment or preventative maintenance program?

An investigation that answers these and related questions will probably reveal conditions that are more open to correction than attempts to prevent "carelessness".

The accident investigation process involves the following steps:

- Seek first aid or medical assistance, if necessary
- Tell your immediate supervisor or manager in your department so they can investigate and implement prevention measures
- Document by contacting SAFE (902-473-7233) within 24 hours (if medical status prevents immediate notification to SAFE, do so as soon as possible or have a co-worker or supervisor report)
- Supervisor or manager investigates the incident, hazard or concern
- Identify the causes and the actions necessary to address the causes
- Complete the incident investigation report form and send to SAFE, the applicable JOHSC and review with affected staff



- Develop a plan for corrective action
- Implement the plan
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the corrective action
- Make changes for continuous improvement

The most important final step is to come up with a set of well-considered prevention actions or recommendations designed to prevent recurrences. **Prevention actions or recommendations should:**

- be specific
- be constructive
- get at root causes
- identify contributing factors

Resist the temptation to make only general recommendations to save time and effort.

For example, you have determined that a blind corner contributed to an accident. Rather than just recommending "eliminate blind corners" it would be better to suggest:

- install mirrors at the northwest corner of building X (specific to this accident)
- install mirrors at blind corners where required throughout the worksite (general)

Management is responsible for implementing prevention actions or acting on the recommendations in the accident investigation report.

Follow-up actions include:

- Respond to the recommendations in the report by explaining what can and cannot be done (and why or why not).
- Develop a timetable for corrective actions.
- Monitor that the scheduled actions have been completed.
- Check the condition of injured worker(s).
- Inform and train other workers at risk.
- Re-orient worker(s) on their return to work.