

Incident Investigation

All incidents or allegations must be investigated – regardless of size or impact. By actively investigating, it helps to move beyond *what* happened to understanding *why* it happened. Once *why* is understood, then corrective measures can be implemented to prevent future incidents. This spotlight provides tips to create an effective investigation plan.

Conducting Investigations – A Four Step Systems Approach

1. Preserve/Document the Scene

- Preserve the scene (cones, tape, guards) to prevent material evidence from being removed or altered.
- Document the facts. Essential information includes: name, date and location of the incident, any injury description, and witnesses.
 - Creating checklists is useful for gathering the information



2. Collect Information

- Gather supporting documents: equipment manuals, guidance documents, policy(ies) and records, maintenance schedules and logs, training records, etc.
- Interviews can garner additional useful information. When interviewing, remember that the interviewee may have feelings of fear or anxiety. It is important to establish a climate of cooperation and avoid anything that may be perceived as intimidating or in search of someone to blame for the incident. Avoid asking leading questions. Allow the interviewee to tell the story.
 - Conduct interviews in the natural language of the interviewee. If necessary, have a translator present.

3. Determine Root Causes

- After steps 1 and 2 are completed, the next task is to identify the root cause. The root cause is the underlying reasons why the incident occurred.
 - Identifying the root cause is the result of persistently asking “why” and is the most effective way to prevent the incident from happening again.

4. Implement Corrective Actions

- Corrective actions should address the root cause.
- If the corrective action is weak, for example, personal protective equipment (PPE) should be worn in the future, then it is unlikely to improve the safety culture or prevent future incidents. A stronger corrective action is to make sure the PPE is highly visible and readily available in areas that require it.
- There may be more than one corrective action. Using the same PPE example, training should also be provided on how to fit the PPE. Training should also include a review of policies and expectations.
- Inspections should be conducted to confirm the corrective actions implemented are being followed.

Each incident serves as an opportunity to prevent future incidents. Thorough investigations are the key to prevention!