

CHECKLIST FOR INCIDENT INVESTIGATIONS

1. Obtain the basic facts

- Date and time of incident
- Names and contact details of injured / affected person(s), age, sex, occupation / course of study (if a student)
- The nature of the injury / ill health / assault / property damage sustained, details of treatment received, hospital attended, length of stay, length of absence from work/study
- Location details and layout of the area in which the incident occurred
- Details of witnesses / people first on the scene of the incident / first aiders who attended
- Condition and description of plant or equipment involved (before and after the incident) - including make, model, serial number, safety devices provided etc.
- If appropriate, take photographs, draw sketches and take measurements to record the scene of the incident before things are moved, repaired and cleaned up. The University may need this evidence later.
- Any hazardous substances in use or present (obtain Safety Data Sheets if they are not already available), if applicable to the incident
- Names, contact details of any contractors involved, you may need to contact them later.

2. Establish the circumstances of the incident

- Events leading up to the incident - what was the sequence of events?
- What was being done at the time of the incident, was this unusual or different from normal?
- What were the immediate causes of the incident – how did it happen?
- If investigating a case of occupational disease or ill health, is there any evidence linking this to work activities?
- What instructions were given to those involved, before the incident?
- What were the established methods of work and procedures?
- What was the behaviour and actions of individuals before, during and after the incident?
- What was the role of supervisors and managers in the activities concerned?

3. Identify the underlying causes of the incident

There is often far more to accidents than simply unsafe acts by individuals or unsafe conditions, you need to consider why the circumstances leading to the incident occurred, and went unnoticed and unchecked. How did things get this far? Consider the following:

- Has anything similar happened before? Check the accident book, ask around
- Has the problem been mentioned before, when, by whom, what action was taken?
- Was this risk known and had a risk assessment been completed for this activity / substance / these premises, is it suitable and sufficient?
- Were University or local guidelines, policies or rules being followed?
- What control measures and safety equipment were identified by the risk assessment – are they still in place and effective (were the individuals doing the work aware of these)?
- Are any management or supervision failures evident?
- Was communication between the relevant parties adequate and effective?
- What was the level of competence of those involved – including the nature of any training, instruction or information provided, was it adequate?
- Are there any shortcomings in the original installation or design, if relevant?
- Were adequate performance standards set and monitored by management?

- Was there an adequate system for maintenance and cleaning of premises or equipment?
- Were systems of work that individuals were expected to follow actually being followed in practice?, were these systems workable and realistic (if not, why not?)
- Was personal protective equipment provided, was it suitable and effective (if not, why not?)
- Is record keeping adequate?

4. Establish whether the initial management and emergency response was adequate

- Was the initial response to the incident by the University prompt and effective? Consider the actions taken to make the situation safe, or to deal with any continuing risks
- Was the response to the incident by the Emergency Services or other external agencies, prompt and effective?
- Was the fire fighting and first aid response suitable, were correct spillage procedures known and followed?
- Was the incident promptly reported to the relevant parties (if not, why not)?
- How was the injured person treated and supported –was this adequate?
- Were the needs of witnesses adequately addressed (de-briefing, counselling etc)?

5. Identify any further action needed to prevent a recurrence

You should assess or reassess the risks of this particular activity / equipment / area. When doing this you should question the adequacy of existing control measures and work methods and any discrepancy between these and what was intended. You will need to establish if the existing controls meet current standards are adequate to effectively control risks.

In particular, you may need to;

- Improve physical safeguards or safety features or modify design or workplace layout
- Improve existing work methods or introduce new safe working procedures
- Provide additional safety equipment e.g. lifting aids, personal protective equipment
- Produce or review risk assessments
- Update written health & safety rules, standards or policies, communicate these to employees / students, as appropriate
- Improve communications systems
- Make changes to or provide extra training, supervision or information sources
- Introduce better testing, maintenance or cleaning arrangements
- Introduce inspection, monitoring and audit systems
- Review similar risks in other sections

Once you have identified what action is required to prevent a recurrence of the incident in question, you should record your recommendations in the form of an action plan, making it clear what is required, by when and who will be responsible for implementing the improvements required.

Remember:

- Always talk to the injured person and witnesses to get their account of events
- Verify the facts – do not make assumptions about what happened
- The most important thing is not to apportion blame, but to learn from our mistakes, so as to continually improve health and safety standards.