

Michigan Municipal Workers' Compensation Fund

Safety and Health Resource Manual

INVESTIGATIVE PROCEDURES

The actual procedures used in a particular investigation depend on the nature and results of the accident. The agency having jurisdiction over the location determines the administrative procedures. In general, responsible officials will appoint an individual to be in charge of the investigation. The investigator uses most of the following steps:

1. Define the scope of the investigation.
2. Select the investigators. Assign specific tasks to each (preferably in writing).
3. Present a preliminary briefing to the investigating team, including:
 - a. Description of the accident, with damage estimates.
 - b. Normal operating procedures.
 - c. Maps (local and general).
 - d. Location of the accident site.
 - e. List of witnesses.
 - f. Events that preceded the accident.
4. Visit the accident site to get updated information.
5. Inspect the accident site.
 - a. Secure the area. Do not disturb the scene unless a hazard exists.
 - b. Prepare the necessary sketches and photographs. Label each carefully and keep accurate records.
6. Interview each victim and witness. Also interview those who were present before the accident and those who arrived at the site shortly after the accident. Keep accurate records of each interview. Use a tape recorder if desired and if approved.
7. Determine.
 - a. What was not normal before the accident.
 - b. Where the abnormality occurred.
 - c. When it was first noted.
 - d. How it occurred.
8. Analyze the data obtained in step 7. Repeat any of the prior steps, if necessary.
9. Determine.
 - a. Why the accident occurred.

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- b. A likely sequence of events and probable causes (direct, indirect, basic).
 - c. Alternative sequences.
10. Check each sequence against the data from step 7.
 11. Determine the most likely sequence of events and the most probable causes.
 12. Conduct a post-investigation briefing.
 13. Prepare a summary report, including the recommended actions to prevent a recurrence. Distribute the report according to applicable instructions.

An investigation is not complete until all data are analyzed and a final report is completed. In practice, the investigative work, data analysis, and report preparation proceed simultaneously over much of the time spent on the investigation.

FACT-FINDING

Gather evidence from many sources during an investigation. Get information from witnesses and reports as well as by observation. Interview witnesses as soon as possible after an accident. Inspect the accident site before any changes occur. Take photographs and make sketches of the accident scene. Record all pertinent data on maps. Get copies of all reports. Documents containing normal operating procedures, flow diagrams, maintenance charts, or reports of difficulties or abnormalities are particularly useful. Keep complete and accurate notes in a bound notebook. Record pre-accident conditions, the accident sequence, and post-accident conditions. In addition, document the location of victims, witnesses, machinery, energy sources, and hazardous materials.

In some investigations, a particular physical or chemical law, principle, or property may explain a sequence of events. Include laws in the notes taken during the investigation or in the later analysis of data. In addition, gather data during the investigation that may lend itself to analysis by these laws, principles, or properties. An appendix in the final report can include an extended discussion.

INTERVIEWS

In general, experienced personnel should conduct interviews. If possible, the team assigned to this task should include an individual with a legal background. In conducting interviews, the team should:

1. Appoint a speaker for the group.
2. Get preliminary statements as soon as possible from all witnesses.
3. Locate the position of each witness on a master chart (including the direction of view).
4. Arrange for a convenient time and place to talk to each witness.
5. Explain the purpose of the investigation (accident prevention) and put each witness at ease.

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6. Listen, let each witness speak freely, and be courteous and considerate.
7. Take notes without distracting the witness. Use a tape recorder only with consent of the witness.
8. Use sketches and diagrams to help the witness.
9. Emphasize areas of direct observation. Label hearsay accordingly.
10. Be sincere and do not argue with the witness.
11. Record the exact words used by the witness to describe each observation. Do not "put words into a witness' mouth."
12. Word each question carefully and be sure the witness understands.
13. Identify the qualifications of each witness (name, address, occupation, years of experience, etc.).
14. Supply each witness with a copy of his or her statements. Signed statements are desirable.

After interviewing all witnesses, the team should analyze each witness' statement. They may wish to re-interview one or more witnesses to confirm or clarify key points. While there may be inconsistencies in witnesses' statements, investigators should assemble the available testimony into a logical order. Analyze this information along with data from the accident site.

Not all people react in the same manner to a particular stimulus. For example, a witness within close proximity to the accident may have an entirely different story from one who saw it at a distance. Some witnesses may also change their stories after they have discussed it with others. The reason for the change may be additional clues.

A witness who has had a traumatic experience may not be able to recall the details of the accident. A witness who has a vested interest in the results of the investigation may offer biased testimony. Finally, eyesight, hearing, reaction time, and the general condition of each witness may affect his or her powers of observation. A witness may omit entire sequences because of a failure to observe them or because their importance was not realized.