



Incident Investigation Guidelines

Introduction

AHL has a duty of care to investigate all OHS incidents. Health & Safety Representatives (HSR's) and, where applicable, Hostel Managers/Divisional Managers are responsible for conducting the investigation. Incidents may be investigated on two levels:

- Internally – as part of a normal process of review and evaluation to determine what happened, confirm the cause/s of the incident and minimise the risk of further similar incidents occurring
- Externally – by Comcare in response to a notifiable incident.

The size and scope of an investigation should be relative to the nature of the incident and its outcomes. A simple slip or trip that results in no injury or illness may require an informal discussion with the involved person/s. Incidents that resulted in more serious injury or illness, or those dangerous occurrences with severe potential outcomes need to be investigated in some detail.

This guideline provides information to assist managers to conduct an internal investigation of incidents needing a more detailed investigation; either because of the serious outcomes (or potential outcomes), or the cause of the incident is complex or not readily apparent.

Notifying Comcare

As detailed in the OHS Policy & Guidelines, Section 3.2.2, an OHS incident must be reported to Comcare:

- Only if the incident occurred because it involved performing AHL work, including travelling to and from work); and
- It resulted in:
 - Death or serious personal injury (a person needs emergency treatment by a registered medical practitioner; or treatment in a hospital as a casualty without being admitted, or admission to hospital); or
 - An employee being incapacitated for performing work for a period of 30 or more successive shifts; or
 - A dangerous occurrence.

While Comcare may conduct investigations of notifiable incidents, it is important that an internal investigation is also conducted to determine the causes and to ensure all practicable steps are taken to prevent a similar incident recurring.

If a serious injury or death occurs, the scene must be left undisturbed as much as possible for investigating officers from Comcare. If there is any remaining hazard after the incident, then the work in that area should stop until the area is made safe.

Which incidents need to be formally investigated internally?

Any incident that results in death, serious injury, illness or incapacity should be investigated. Also 'near misses' that could have resulted in death, serious injury or incapacity must also be investigated. Near misses have the same causes and actions as more serious incidents, only the outcomes vary. Therefore investigation of near misses can be useful in prevention of more serious incidents. Any incidents where the cause of the incident is unclear or complex, regardless of the outcome, should also be formally investigated.

Why investigate incidents?

The main aim of investigating incidents is to:

- Identify the cause and therefore prevent similar incidents in the future;
- Identify any new hazards;
- Identify and choose appropriate hazard management controls;
- To inform the work group concerned the reasons for the accident and what remedial action has been undertaken; and
- To comply with legislation.

AHL is committed to reducing the impact to injured workers of pain, suffering, work disruption and loss of earnings. A reduction in workplace incidents will also reduce the financial costs to AHL. These outcomes can be achieved by a full and accurate investigation into workplace incidents.

When to investigate incidents?

Investigations need to occur in a timely manner to help ensure the accuracy of information. Normally this will be as soon as possible following the incident and after attending to any injured employees or isolating the unsafe work area, if required.

Conducting an investigation

The causes of incidents are rarely simple. The investigation should aim to identify all causal factors so that suitable strategies can be implemented to minimise the risk of the incident recurring. Work process deficiencies should get particular attention.

Investigation Principles

The investigator must be objective and keep an open mind when examining the causes and results of an incident. In particular:

- Do not make assumptions - judgements must be based on information that is known to be accurate and complete;
- Ask open-ended question and don't put words into the mouths of witnesses;
- Reassure those involved that the investigation is to find out why the incident occurred and to prevent it happening again (it is not about apportioning blame);
- Apply a positive approach to finding ways to modify the work environment;
- Look for underlying causes as well as the obvious (eg. workplace attitudes, poor work practices, lack of training);
- Take photographs, or make sketches where necessary;
- Obtain expert technical advice if needed; and
- Use the OHS Incident Investigation Form to guide you through the process.

Issues to be considered in the investigation

The following issues may need to be considered:

- The date, time and location of the incident;
- The employee/s or other person/s involved and their status;
- Events leading up to the incident;
- The work being carried out at the time;
- A description of any injuries or property damage;
- The condition of any equipment involved;
- The general work environment at the time;
- Whether guidelines and/or standard operating procedures were being followed;
- Any relevant personal factors related to the employee/s or person/s involved (for example: experience levels, age, physical factors such as health);
- Any ergonomic factors;
- The level of supervision/direction at the time;
- Training the employee/s had received; and
- The root cause/s of the incident and any other contributing factors that can be identified.

Steps in conducting an investigation

The following steps should be considered in conducting an investigation and applied where relevant:

- Arrange immediate, appropriate medical attention for injured persons;
- Control the scene (erect barriers, turn off power, appoint a guard over the site);
- Conduct interviews at the scene if possible. Ensure witnesses can discuss the incident in relative privacy where possible;
- After each interview repeat the statement back to them to ensure you have correctly recorded their version of events;
- Close each interview on a positive note;
- Take immediate corrective action where warranted;
- Complete an Incident Investigation Form, including recommendations; and
- Schedule follow-up action and make sure it takes place.

Key Questions to ask during an investigation

Who?

- Who was involved in the incident?
- Who witnessed the incident?
- What are the contact details of those involved?
- Who else could provide relevant information?

What?

- What happened?
- What work was being done at the time?
- What materials, equipment or substances were involved?
- Were there any defects or modifications to the materials, equipment and substances?
- What other relevant information can you add?

Where?

- Where did the incident actually occur?
- Can you describe the conditions at the location – eg. Lighting, floor conditions, temperature, climatic conditions, noise and other environmental factors?

When?

- When did the incident actually occur (exact time and date)?
- Were there any other relevant timing factors (such as shift change, work cycle, rest breaks etc)?

How?

- How did the incident happen?
- Can you outline the full sequence of events (before, during and after the incident)?
- Did you notice any unusual or strange events or occurrences?

Why?

- Why do you think the incident occurred?
- Can you identify other potential direct or indirect causes?
- Can you advise how we can prevent this incident from recurring?

Incident reporting

All formal internal investigations must be reported using the OH&S Incident Investigation Form. This form helps provide a structure for the investigation and provides a template for presenting key information in an efficient manner.

Note: The Privacy Act 1988 prohibits reporting of personal details to the committee therefore names and relevant personal details remain confidential when occurrences are reported to OH&S committees.

Follow up action after an investigation

Completed Incident Investigation Reports must be sent to the relevant Senior Manager for the work area where the incident occurred. The Senior Manager should determine who is responsible for implementing the recommendations. A review process should also be planned to ensure that the recommended actions are completed, and they have had the desired effect.

A copy of the Incident Investigation Report must be forwarded to the RM/DM who will be responsible for monitoring the any recommended remedial action and arranging for appropriate compensation and rehabilitation, where required. The RM or Div. manager is responsible for providing a copy of the report to the Regional/Central Office OHS committee and the National OHS Officer is responsible for providing a copy of the report to the National OHS Committee.

It is also important that the incident is reported appropriately through the AHL Incident Reporting Process.

References

- Occupational Health and Safety (Commonwealth Employment) Act 1991 [Sections 68 and 69].
- Occupational Health and Safety (Commonwealth Employment) [Regulations 1991 - Regulations 2, 3, 36A 37 and 37A-G]
- Guide to Incident Reporting and Notification (Comcare 2001)
- Privacy Act 1988 [Information Privacy Principles]
- AHL OH&S Manual
- AHL OH&S Incident Investigation Form