

A photograph of a construction site with a blue overlay. A worker in a yellow hard hat and safety vest is sitting on the ground, looking distressed. Two other workers in safety gear are attending to him. The background shows construction equipment and materials.

THE BENEFITS OF INCIDENT INVESTIGATION

A MANAGER'S GUIDE



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INTERNATIONAL
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INTRODUCTION

Although nobody wants an accident to happen in the workplace, the investigation process can have some benefits, if it's carried out properly. As well as making the workplace a safer environment in which to work in the future, unsafe practices can be identified and prevented from happening again, thus preventing further business losses from disruption and downtime.

The outcomes of workplace incidents are generally expensive, as well as there being legal repercussions if the

company is found to have been negligent. It is therefore your priority as a manager to do all you can to ensure you don't experience a workplace incident.

Health and safety investigations form an essential part of the monitoring process that you are required to carry out. Incidents, including near misses, can tell you a lot about how things actually are in reality. This guide will take you through the basics.



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SOME DEFINITIONS



INCIDENT

An incident is an undesired and unplanned event that has caused or could have caused death, injury, ill health or damage to assets, the environment or third parties.



NEAR MISS

This is an event which, under different circumstances, might have resulted in injury or ill health, or damage or loss to property, plant, materials or the environment, or a loss of business opportunity. In high-risk industries, such as construction, these incidents should be recorded.



ACCIDENT

This is an unplanned event that resulted in injury or ill health, or damage or loss to property, plant, materials or the environment, or a loss of business opportunity. This is where the incident actually caused harm.



DO ALL INCIDENTS GET REPORTED?

Not all incidents will get reported, and there are various reasons as to why this might be so. As a manager, it is important that you understand what these reasons might be and, more importantly, try to overcome them.



FEAR

- I might be blamed for it.
- I was doing something I shouldn't have been doing.
- It's the second / third / fourth time that it's happened – this time I'll really get into trouble.



TIME

- It takes too long to report it.
- I might lose some pay if I am off work.



LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

- No one told me I should report it.
- I didn't know how to report it.
- I didn't really think it was important.



CULTURE

- No one else reports them, so why should I?
- No one will do anything about it, so why should I?
- It's a dangerous job so we expect to get hurt.
- I wasn't that badly hurt and didn't think it was important.

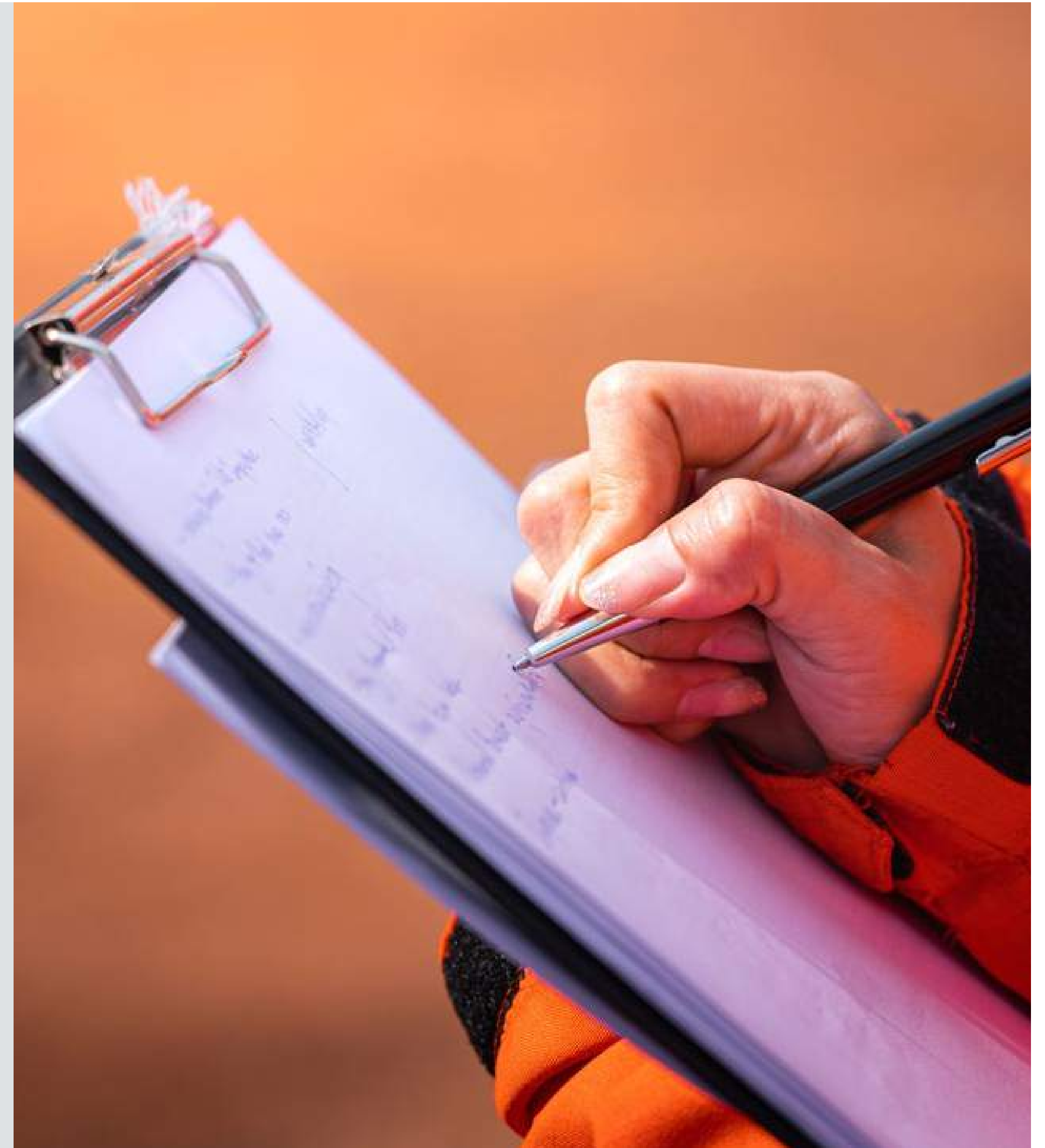
Investigation is about finding out what went wrong and why so that it doesn't happen again. It's not about finding out who is to blame.

While we think it may never happen to us and our organisation, having plans and procedures in place for investigating incidents before they occur will help to make the investigation process as effective as possible if the worst happens.

WHY INVESTIGATE INCIDENTS?

There are many reasons why your company should investigate incidents that occur in the workplace:

- > To collect information that may need to be passed on to the Enforcing Authority.
- > To collect information that may need to be used in the event of a compensation claim.
- > To establish what happened and to identify the real cause.
- > To identify whether any action needs to be taken to stop it from happening again.
- > To advise others in the organisation of the circumstances, so that everybody can learn from the event.
- > Unless we take the time to investigate incidents, we can never learn from them.



KEY ACTIONS IN EFFECTIVE ACCIDENT/INCIDENT INVESTIGATION



The HSE offers the following guidance for managers.

- Formulate plans:
 - ▶ What must workers report?
 - ▶ How will reporting procedures be communicated to workers?
 - ▶ How will work-related ill health, accidents or near misses be notified?
 - ▶ Who will assist in the investigation?
 - ▶ What action will be taken as a result?
 - ▶ How will you identify trends?
- Ensure reporting procedures are suitable and workable.
- Examine all incident / accident / near miss reports and identify trends.
- Be proportionate in any investigation, according to the level of risk identified. Establish what happened, when, where and why. Collect evidence:
 - ▶ Consider what the evidence shows.
 - ▶ Compare what you have found against industry standards/HSE guidance, etc.
 - ▶ Investigate accidents with a high priority – before people's memories fade and while evidence is still available.
- Look at root or underlying issues not just immediate causes:
 - ▶ Immediate causes – premises, plant and substances, procedures, or people
 - ▶ Underlying causes – management arrangements and organisational factors. such as design, selection of materials, maintenance, management of change, adequacy of risk controls, communication, competence, etc.
- Record and keep findings:
 - ▶ They may be required later in a formal investigation or legal proceedings
- Engage specialist help to support complex investigations, e.g. an operation involving major accident hazards.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- > It is your priority as a manager to do all you can to ensure you don't experience a workplace incident.
- > Health and safety investigations form an essential part of the monitoring process that you are required to carry out.
- > Incidents, including near misses, can tell you a lot about how things actually are in reality.
- > The investigation process can have some benefits to an organisation, if carried out properly. As well as making the workplace a safer environment, unsafe practices can be identified and prevented from happening again.
- > Having plans and procedures in place for investigating incidents before they occur will help to make the investigation process as effective as possible.
- > Investigation is about finding out what went wrong and why so that it doesn't happen again. It's not about finding out who is to blame.



FURTHER READING

[HSE: Investigating accidents and incidents](#)

[HSE: Key actions in effective accident/incident investigation](#)

[RoSPA: Learning from safety failure](#)



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IOSH MANAGING SAFELY from International Workplace

Study online or by virtual
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All of the content in this guide is taken from International Workplace's IOSH Managing Safely course.

The course covers:

- Basic principles of health and safety – moral, financial and legal
- Concept of safety management – using the Plan/Do/Check/Act model
- Importance of health and safety strategy, plans and objectives
- Management of occupational risk – risk profiling
- The legal framework – criminal and civil, corporate manslaughter, corporate and personal liabilities
- Enforcement arrangements
- Safety leadership – key actions a senior manager can take
- Reviewing your health and safety performance and risk management arrangements

To find out more about the course, visit

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