



# UNIVERSITY POLICY AND MANAGEMENT PROCEDURE

## Accident Investigation

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## **Statement**

*This Management Procedure was approved and authorised by the Health, Safety and Welfare Committee on **29 May 2008** on behalf of the University of York Council and forms part of the Health and Safety Policy of the University of York.*

*This document is University Policy for good health and safety management practice. This University Policy provides Deans of Faculty, Heads of Departments, Heads of College and all managers, staff and students with the necessary information to incorporate healthy and safe practices and relevant procedures into their activities. Divergence from this University Policy may result in Deans of Faculty, Heads of Departments, Heads of College and the University of York being exposed to possible legal proceedings.*

*The use of this University Policy and the incorporation of its requirements into working practices and activities will ensure that the University of York and its' community achieves compliance with its' legal duties with regard to health and safety.*

*The most recent version of this Management Procedure is available at <https://www.york.ac.uk/admin/hsas/safetynet/atoz.htm>*

<i>Date of Review</i>	<i>May 2018</i>	<i>By</i>	<i>Director of Health, Safety and Security</i>
<i>Date of Last Review</i>	<i>November 2015</i>	<i>By</i>	<i>Director of Health, Safety and Security</i>
<i>Date of Next Review</i>	<i>May 2020</i>		

## UNIVERSITY POLICY

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Accidents and incidents are usually a result of a number of factors coming together at the same time with an outcome that is not planned or intended. An unplanned event may result in injury to people, ill health, damage to property or loss and may involve a combination of all.

All accidents and incidents will require a level of investigation with the following primary objectives:

- Determine the facts and sequence of events leading to the accident or incident.
- Determine the causes by establishing any unsafe acts or conditions.
- Determine the human, organisational and/or job factors that gave rise to the unsafe acts and/or conditions.
- Not to identify or attribute blame.
- Take both long term and short term measures to prevent a recurrence.
- Ensure compliance with University policies and the law.

Near miss incidents and dangerous occurrences should also be investigated. This type of event is where an unplanned event occurs for which there is no resultant injury; however, the potential exists for harm to result if the event occurred under different circumstances. This means that the same immediate and basic potential causes of an accident are in place but that, on this occasion, the outcome is limited to the event's occurrence without resultant injury, loss or significant damage.

Not all accidents, etc. will require the same level of time, resource and effort to undertake an investigation. The investigation may vary considerably according to the potential severity of injury and/or ill health and/or damage and/or loss.

Records of all investigations including supporting documentation, etc. are to be retained for the purposes of assurance and audit.

## ARRANGEMENTS

### 2. ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

An accident is usually the result of a number of factors coming together at the same time to cause something to happen that was not intended or planned. Not all accidents and incidents will need to be investigated and those that do will not all need to be investigated to the same extent or depth. Each accident or incident should be assessed to determine the level of effort and resource required to gain the most benefit.

The greatest effort should concentrate on events where there has been serious injury, ill health, damage or loss, as well as those that have the potential to cause the same. The potential for subsequent litigation should also be taken into account.

When undertaking an investigation the following should be considered:

- The need to investigate an incident and how was reported.
- The appropriate staff and resources to conduct an investigation should be notified and assembled.
- Any necessary equipment to support an investigation should be assembled.
- If necessary the accident/incident scene should be secured to prevent additional dangers, to preserve evidence and to enable samples to be collected.
- All relevant physical evidence should be inspected, recorded and, if necessary samples taken.
- Work activities, systems and conditions should be examined, and/or tested.
- Documentation should be collated and examined including a review of any related or previous incidents and investigations.
- Witnesses and those injured should be interviewed.
- Any unsafe acts and conditions along with underlying causes of incidents should be analysed.
- Remedial action should be taken to prevent any recurrence.
- A report of the investigation with recommendations will be prepared and distributed to appropriate staff including the Head of Department/College (HoD/C), Departmental Safety Advisor (DSA) or College Safety Officer (CSO), and Line Manager.

The Investigating Officer should keep an open mind, and not be unduly influenced by what should have happened; it is important to determine the facts surrounding what actually happened. It is important to remember that the objective of any investigation is to determine what events or possible shortfalls in training, management or procedures led to the accident or incident. It is not the function of the investigation to apportion blame or to recommend disciplinary action. This may arise as part of the investigation, but should not be emphasised during the process.

In addition to investigations undertaken locally by Departments, the Health, Safety and Security Department (HSSD) may choose to investigate accidents and incidents that are of a serious

nature, or are likely to be of interest to the Enforcing Authority (EA) or may have strategic implications at the University.

Upon completion of an accident or incident investigation, the Investigating Officer will send the completed Accident Investigation Report and supporting documents to the HoD, DSA, CSO and Line Manager for action as necessary.

### **3. OBJECTIVE OF INVESTIGATIONS**

An investigation should aim to:

- Ascertain immediate and underlying causes.
- Discover the facts associated with the accident or incident.
- Ensure the causes are properly established.
- Prevent recurrence of similar accidents or incidents.
- Not to apportion blame or recommend disciplinary action.
- Ensure that any University legal reporting or notification requirements are met.

### **4. THE INVESTIGATION PROCESS**

Following the notification of an incident or accident the following question must be asked; has anybody sustained any form of injury as a result of an incident, violence or aggression, damage to property or loss?

If the answer to the above question is NO; but the potential for injury, damage or loss was present, then complete an Accident Report Form indicating a Near Miss Incident and inform the DSA/CSO and the Director of Health, Safety and Security (DHSS) in accordance with the University Policy.

If the answer to the above question is YES, then complete an Accident Report Form and inform the relevant DSA/CSO and DHSS in accordance with the University Policy.

The DSA/CSO or appropriate person (Line Manager) will undertake an initial investigation into the incident to determine the root cause to prevent any recurrence. This initial investigation is to be undertaken within 5 working days. During this process the DHSS will review the initial findings of the DSA/CSO or appropriate person to establish whether the incident is notifiable to the relevant EA under RIDDOR.

If the findings of the initial investigation by the DSA/CSO or appropriate person and review by the DHSS indicate that the incident is notifiable to the relevant EA the DSA/CSO or appropriate person will produce an Investigation Report within 7 days with any necessary recommendations to the HoD and DHSS.

The DHSS will notify to the relevant EA within 10 days of the incident being brought to his attention. Dependent upon the nature and outcome of the incident the DHSS or Senior Management Team of the University may commission a Formal Investigation.

Progress and implementation of recommendations of such investigations will be communicated to the Health, Safety and Welfare Committee (HSWC) on a case by case basis.

Trade Unions (TU) and their representatives may conduct their own independent or joint investigations because of an incident, violence or aggression, damage to property or loss. The responsibility for informing TU and their representatives of an accident or incident in which they have been involved lies with the individual.

Local Management and Investigating Officers should also consider and take into account that this investigation process is not exclusive of other University Policies including Disciplinary Procedures currently in place.

## **5. CONDUCTING AN INVESTIGATION**

The following factors should be taken into consideration when deciding the extent of the investigation to be conducted:

- The type and severity of injury, damage, loss or the potential for serious injury and/or damage.
- Whether the accident or incident indicates the continuation of a particular trend in the Department's accident experience, or is the first one which could be repeated; for example the introduction of a new process, that has implications for other areas.
- The extent to which material affected the accident; for example machinery, work equipment, hazardous substances, and caused damage or loss.
- The possibility of a breach of University Policy and Procedures or the Law.
- Whether the injury or occurrence is notifiable to the EA.

### **5.1 Who Should Investigate?**

Investigations are to be undertaken by an individual with the status and knowledge to make recommendations to the HoD/C, however there will be occasions when it will not be practical for example, if the injured party is on detached duty. In such circumstances, guidance should be sought from the DHSS.

Trade Union Employee Safety Representatives should be extended the offer of participating in investigations as they will provide a valuable contribution and interface across the University. TU Employees have a legal right (if they so wish) to investigate accidents and incidents notifiable to the EA.

If there is any doubt as to the type of investigation to be conducted or those parties that

should be involved, advice is to be sought from the DHSS.

Following an accident or incident an Investigating Officer should be appointed. The Investigating Officer should immediately start the investigation and:

- Interview witnesses, including the injured person when available records and notes should be maintained.
- Examine the scene of the accident or incident and record details of equipment, positions, and environment and weather conditions if relevant.
- Assess evidence gathered and analyse the material to determine the events and likely causes that led to the accident or incident.
- It may be necessary to seek specialist assistance and guidance during the investigation.
- Prepare a report of the facts and findings, making recommendations to prevent recurrence.
- If there is any doubt or concern on the application or the principles set out in this Management Procedure, advice should be sought from the DHSS.

## **5.2 Assembling the Evidence**

There will be a number of sources of information available to an Investigating Officer, and may include or involve direct observation of the accident or incident scene; documentary evidence to establish what should have happened through procedures, risk assessments, etc. and interviews with the parties involved which provide an opportunity to check back on any issues arising from the examination of the physical and documentary evidence.

### ***Direct Observation***

The accident or incident site should be visited as soon as practicable to prevent any relevant evidence being removed or cleaned up. However, the safety of the Investigating Officer should also be considered and if there is any doubt whether the area is safe to enter then access to the site should be controlled until a Competent Person has assessed the site as safe to enter.

- Assess the risks of entering the area, determining whether any special precautions are required, e.g. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- Establish that statutory and other notifications of the accident or incident have been made to the HSSD.
- When examining the site every effort should be made to preserve the evidence and to avoid possible contamination or destruction of the evidence.
- Record physical details – these are to be recorded as seen and not as detailed in plans or other documentation. Look around and note anything of importance such as trip hazards, protrusions, accumulation of rubbish etc. Also take any photographs, measurements and dimensions as necessary, and produce a simple sketch if considered appropriate.



### ***Interviews***

Interviews are to be conducted promptly before details fade or become confused and in a place where the injured person or witness feels comfortable. This, of course, depends on the condition of the injured person and witnesses. Always ensure that appropriate First Aid or medical treatment is rendered before trying to conduct the interview. If the injured person is fit to answer questions, adopt the following approach:

- Put the injured person at ease, remain calm and objective and be sympathetic, honest and courteous.
- Ask them to recount what happened in their own words and take notes, repeating back key points at the end of the interview to check the details are correct.
- Do not ask leading questions, interrupt or argue.
- Check the answers against your own observations and the review of documentary evidence.

Adopt a similar approach with witnesses. Distinguish between fact and opinion and remember that eye witnesses are not always reliable. If there is more than one eye witness, interview them separately.

To assist in the compilation of the investigation report it may be prudent to obtain written statements from the injured person and eye witnesses. Some personnel may have concerns that the provision of a statement may prejudice them with regard to discipline or future litigation against the University. Staff have the right to have a friend, TU or legal representative present during the interview.

### ***Documentary Evidence***

Obtain copies of any relevant documentation, for example; written instructions, local procedures, risk assessments, policies, records of inspections, tests, examinations and surveys and training records etc.

## **5.3 Analysing the Evidence**

Analysis of the evidence should determine:

- Any actions taken or not taken that contributed to the accident.
- The adequacy or absence of suitable control measures.
- The immediate cause(s) of the accident, i.e. unsafe act or conditions.
- The underlying cause(s) of the accident, i.e. management control failings.

A robust investigation will identify both immediate and underlying causes, including human factors. Immediate causes include the job being done and the people involved. Underlying causes are the management and organisation factors that explain why the event occurred. A structured approach to determining accident causation is provided by the HSE, Successful Health and Safety Management publication HS(G) 65.

The DHSS is not responsible for initiating disciplinary proceedings against an individual as a result of an investigation. In certain circumstances, local management may wish to take matters further with individuals if there was evidence of a serious breach in health and safety performance.

#### **5.4 Investigation Report**

Final analysis of the information should determine the actions required to prevent a recurrence and assign responsibilities, priorities and suggested time scales for the actions identified. The final Investigation Report should be completed and circulated to key stakeholders as soon as possible.

Investigation Report Action Plans are to be produced, to support the investigation and used to assign responsibilities, priorities and suggested time scales for the actions identified in agreement with key stakeholders.

A suggested format for an investigation report is outlined below. The length and detail contained within a report will depend on the severity of the accident or incident.

##### **The Event**

- A description of the circumstances including the place, time of day and conditions.
- Details of any injured person, including age, sex, experience, training, etc.
- Any actions which led directly to the event.
- The direct causes of any injuries, ill health or other loss.
- The immediate causes of the event.
- The underlying causes; e.g. failures in workplace precautions, risk control systems or management arrangements.
- The nature of the outcome; e.g. injuries or ill health to employees or other persons working on site, damage to property, process disruption, emissions to the environment, creation of hazards.
- The severity of the harm caused, including injuries, ill health and losses.
- The immediate management response to the situation and its adequacy.
- Whether the event was preventable and, if so, how.

##### **The Potential Consequences**

##### **Conclusions**

##### **Recommendations**

##### **Attachments**

- Witness statements.
- Photographs and diagrams.
- Copy of the basic investigation report or accident report form.

**APPENDIX 1**  
**Management Procedure**  
**Accident Investigation at the University of York**  
**Investigation Report Process Map**

