

USCG 008 - ACCIDENT/INJURY INVESTIGATION

Last Update: 03/08/02

PURPOSE

To provide guidelines on conducting accident/injury investigations.

SCOPE

University-wide – includes all University Operations, Locations, Employees, Students and Registered Volunteers.

GUIDELINES

1. Report emergencies to Public Safety at time of occurrence:

All emergencies should be reported to the FIU Public Safety department by calling university extension 5911.

2. Provide first aid and medical care:

The most important and immediate tasks are rescue operations, medical treatment for the injured, and prevention of further injuries. If the incident occurs on campus, contact Public Safety Department at x5911 to obtain assistance. If the incident occurs at any other location, follow their emergency response notification procedures or call 911. Supervisory personnel should be contacted for guidance or additional emergency response procedures applicable to the location or activity.

The Health Care and Wellness Center provides medical treatment and care for registered students who may experience injuries that do not require hospitalization or critical emergency care.

3. Isolate area to prevent further injuries:

It may be necessary to isolate the location of the injury to prevent other injuries. For example if a machine or device was involved in accident this item should be evaluated prior to resuming work. It may be necessary to “lock-out”, lock-up or “tag-out” the item until it can be evaluated.

4. Report employee injuries to the Office of Human Resources:

Contact the Workers Compensation Program (UP: 348-7960, BBC: 919-5545) at the Department of Environmental Health & Safety, to report the injuries involving employees and obtain guidance on how and where to receive medical attention, if required.

Note: The Health Care and Wellness Center provides medical treatment and care for registered students who may experience injuries that do not require hospitalization or critical emergency care.

5. Investigate the accident:

Investigations should be conducted by someone who is knowledgeable regarding the work processes, procedures and the environment of the particular situation.

6. Identify the causes:

The cause(s) of any accident can be grouped into five categories - *task*, *material*, *environment*, *personnel*, and *management*. Possible causes in each category should be evaluated, some sample questions are given below for each category (These are not exhaustive):

Task: The actual work procedure being used at the time of the accident must be explored, look for answers to questions, such as:

- Was a safe work procedure used?
- Had conditions changed to make the normal procedure unsafe?
- Were the appropriate tools, materials and personal protective equipment available?
- Were the appropriate tools, materials and personal protective equipment being used?
- Were safety devices working properly?
- Had the procedure been evaluated for hazards?
- An important follow-up question is "If not, why not?"

Material: To identify possible causes resulting from the equipment and materials used, the person conducting the investigation might ask:

- Was there an equipment failure?
- If Yes: What caused it to fail?
- Was there a design flaw?
- Was the equipment properly maintained?
- Were hazardous substances involved?
- Were hazardous substances clearly identified?
- Could a less hazardous alternative have been used?
- Was the raw material substandard in some way?
- Should personal protective equipment (PPE) have been used?
- Was the PPE used appropriate?

Again, each time the answer reveals an unsafe condition, the person conducting the investigation must ask **why** this situation was allowed to exist and address the root cause as part of the corrective action.

Environment: The physical environment, especially sudden changes to that environment, has factors that need to be identified. The situation at the time of the accident is important, not what the "usual" conditions were. For example, person conducting the investigation may want to know:

- What were the weather conditions, if relevant?
- Was poor 'housekeeping' a problem?
- Was it too hot, too cold or humid?
- Was noise, vibration or constant distraction a problem?
- Was light or glare a problem?
- Were toxic or hazardous gases, dusts, or fumes present?

Personnel: The physical and mental condition of those individuals directly involved in the event must be explored. The purpose for investigating the accident is **not** to establish blame, but the inquiry will not be complete unless personal characteristics are considered. Some factors will remain essentially constant while others may vary from day to day:

- Was the injured person experienced in the work being done?
- Had they been appropriately trained?
- Were they able to meet the physical demands of the work?
- Was the status of the injured person's health a factor?
- Had the injured person demonstrating symptoms of tiredness or exhaustion?
- Did the injured person appear to have been they under stress (work or personal)?

Management: Management holds the legal responsibility for the safety of the workplace. Therefore, the role of the supervisor, instructor, teaching assistant, etc., even while themselves conducting the investigation, must always be considered. Answers to any of the preceding types of questions logically lead to further questions such as:

- Were safety rules communicated to the injured person in a language and format that they could clearly understand?
- Were written procedures available?
- Were safety standards consistently enforced?
- Was there adequate supervision?
- Was injured person trained to do the work?
- Were hazards previously recognized and identified?
- Were unsafe conditions corrected?
- Was regular maintenance of equipment carried out?
- Were regular safety inspections carried out?

7. Obtain and Document the Facts:

Physical Evidence: Before attempting to gather information, examine the site, take steps to preserve conditions, and identify all witnesses. In cases of serious bodily injury or a fatality, an accident site must not be disturbed without prior approval from appropriate authority such as the the University Public Safety Incident Commander, coroner, or police.

Physical conditions are subject to rapid change or obliteration therefore, they should be the first to be recorded. Based on knowledge of the work process, person conducting the investigation should check items such as:

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| • position of injured person | • damage to equipment |
| • equipment being used | • housekeeping in area |
| • materials being used | • weather conditions |
| • safety devices in use | • lighting levels |
| • position of appropriate guards | • noise levels |
| • position of controls on machinery | • surface conditions |

The person conducting the investigation should consider taking photographs before anything is moved. Pictures should be taken of the general area and specific items

involved in the incident. Later, careful study of these may reveal conditions or observations missed previously. Sketches of the accident scene may also help in subsequent analysis and will clarify written reports.

Broken equipment, debris, and samples of materials involved may be removed for further analysis by appropriate experts. Even if photographs are taken, written notes about the location of these items at the accident scene should also be prepared – Take measurements as appropriate.

Eyewitness Accounts: Although there may be occasions when the person conducting the investigation is unable to do so, every effort should be made to interview witnesses. In some situations witnesses may be the primary source of information because you may be called upon to investigate an accident without being able to examine the scene immediately after the event.

Witnesses should be interviewed as soon as possible after the accident, as individual perceptions may be lost shortly thereafter. Witnesses should be interviewed alone, rather than in a group. It is good to interview a witness at the scene of the accident where it is easier to establish the positions of each person involved and to obtain a description of the events. On the other hand, it may be preferable to carry out interviews in the quiet of an office where there will be fewer distractions. The decision may depend in part on the nature of the accident and the mental state of the witnesses.

Injured / Involved Person's Account: The most important and immediate tasks are rescue operations, medical treatment of the injured, and prevention of further injuries. These take priority, however the injured person is the one who has first hand knowledge of the incident, the person conducting the investigation should interview the injured person as soon as practicable after the accident and document response.

Background Information: An often overlooked source of information are documents such as technical data sheets, maintenance reports, past accident reports, formalized safe-work procedures, and training reports. All pertinent information should be evaluated to see what might have happened, and what changes might be recommended to prevent recurrence of similar accidents.

8. Report of findings:

A investigation report must be prepared and submitted to the Department of Environmental Health & Safety and area supervisor, director, dean, chairperson, etc. The report should include the following items:

- Brief description of accident
- Causes identified during your investigation
- Evidence supporting your finding
- Recommendation to prevent recurrence, including but not limited to changes to physical setup, training, etc.

9. Follow-up

It is essential that you follow-up to verify that recommendations have been implemented and they have addressed the cause of the injury.

For more information regarding this guideline, contact the Department of Environmental Health and Safety at (305) 348-2621.

FORMS: **Accident/Injury Investigation Form**
Visit: <http://www.fiu.edu/~ehs/>