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INVESTIGATIVE PROCEDURE AND REPORT WRITING

by **WILLIAM H. CORRIGAN**

manager, Security department, Ford Motor co., Dearborn, Mich.

The word "investigation" means "to follow up or make research by patient inquiry and observation, and examination of facts." The investigator must be patient and methodical to insure thoroughness and his efforts must be directed toward the gathering of facts. Investigation is fact finding.

In his fact finding, an investigator must be impartial. He is not out to obtain a one-sided story to make a case for his company. He is seeking the exact facts of a situation to determine a course of action. In the safety field, the safety investigator must find out exactly what happened and why it happened. It would serve absolutely no purpose to obtain a biased story which would tend to whitewash any individual or group of individuals.

INVESTIGATIVE PROCEDURES

To guarantee best results and be certain all proper investigative steps are taken, an investigation must be planned in advance. The emergencies in a plant require immediate action from the investigator to obtain facts and interview eye witnesses, but he must not stampede into impetuous or illogical action. He must train himself to follow a logical planned procedure which becomes habitual to the point that he can determine and record vital facts almost automatically.

However, the investigator must never allow his actions to become completely automatic. He must retain a natural curiosity and an inquisitiveness to distinguish one incident from another. An investigator must not slip into a rut giving minimum attention to each incident and furnishing standardized or trite explanations which offer no basis for corrective action.

NOTE TAKING

Because the human memory has its limitations, the investigator should record his findings at all times. At the Ford Motor company, we found that a small bound notebook serves the purpose and is convenient to carry. When completely filled with investigative notes, the notebook can be filed as a permanent record of the investigative findings; and, if necessary, used in court to refresh the recollection of an investigator.

In taking notes, our past experience has established certain principles:

1. When investigating a major case, such as a fire or explosion, start with a fresh book for only that one investigation.

2. Use a separate page for each person interviewed in any investigation. This will prevent intermingling of the facts from different persons, and will simplify assembling notes and dictating from them.

3. Indicate the date of each interview or investigation at the top of each page since it may differ from the date of the case.

4. Identify each interview with full name, badge number, and title or classification of the person, and his address if he is not an employee. In obtaining the person's surname, spell it back to insure accuracy. It is advisable to include the business telephone extension and the home telephone number of the person interviewed so he may be reached quickly.

5. Notes should be made unobtrusively and the person interviewed should never be interrupted merely to fill out the notes. The original story can be recorded in the form of key words or phrases and the entire story filled out later by the investigator for a complete recollection.

The notes taken during the interview help you to question him further on details. Make as many notes as possible on what he tells you, and add notes to remind you of the questions you wish to ask later. A good idea is to identify these reminders by some simple symbol such as a star.

6. If taking notes creates any reluctance in the interviewee, stop taking notes immediately and talk freely with the person. Thereafter, when you must write down a name or number, start taking notes at that time and work gradually into a more complete recording.

You also can tell a reluctant witness that notes prevent misquoting or misunderstanding what he says. In cases of extreme reluctance, it may be advisable to dispense entirely with note taking during the interview. In such cases, the investigator should take sufficient time after the interview to record all pertinent details before proceeding with the investigation.

7. Do not neglect to record negative information. Where persons interviewed say they did not observe the accident or can furnish no information, identify these persons and note that fact. This may not help determine the cause of the accident, but it can later prevent these persons from giving false testimony that they saw the accident and that they noted it was caused by a particular set of circumstances.

INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES

At least 50 per cent of interviewing is being a good listener, and recording what you hear. You must make interviewees want to confide in you, by creating mutual respect and trust between yourself and the person being interviewed. To reach this objective, the following procedures are suggested:

1. Identify yourself with credentials if necessary, to the interviewee leaving no question in his mind who you are, and which component you represent. Speak clearly and with authority. You must sell him the idea that you know your job and you can be trusted.

2. Explain the purpose of your work. Confide sufficiently in the person so he knows what you are trying to achieve, and will feel he can help by furnishing information. Show him that safer working conditions can be created for all employees, including himself, by determining the causes of accidents to eliminate them.

3. Control the course of the interview. When interviewing eye witnesses, ask the person to tell you, in his own words, what he saw. Do not interrupt him at any time, even if he strays slightly. If he rambles entirely away from the subject matter then insert sufficient comment to bring him back to the proper course. This should be confined, however, to a minimum of questioning.

Remember you are there to hear what he has to say, and you will not obtain any information listening to yourself talk. Although you may have vital questions to ask on a particular phase of an accident, do not interrupt him when he is telling his own version of what happened.

4. When the person finishes talking, go over the entire story to fill in any gaps, and to make sure you correctly understand what he said. At this time ask specific questions to obtain greater detail and any additional facts he may have overlooked. This is the time to ask questions which occurred to you while he was telling his story.

As you ask each question you starred for a reminder, check off that reminder so you can review the sheet quickly to see all desired points were covered.

5. In interviewing witnesses, be sure you get all primary details, such as:

a. What he and the injured employee were doing immediately before the accident.

b. What did he observe at the time of the accident itself.

c. Was he close enough to hear what the injured employee said immediately after the injury. Usually statements made immediately after an accident are the truth, as they are made on the spur of the moment. They reflect the first thing that comes to the injured employee's mind, and are usually different from those logically thought out many moments or hours afterward. Examples of such statements could be: "The darn thing repeated itself."

"I knew I should have kept those glasses on."

d. What happened immediately after the accident.

This line of questioning gives a complete picture of the facts. If you record only the witness' or the injured employee's statement, he will tell only what he thinks important and may neglect to relate pertinent facts.

6. Witnesses may tell conflicting stories regarding an accident. You must determine how much weight their version should carry by:

a. Asking what they were doing when the accident occurred.

b. What was their position at the time—how far away were they?
c. Were there any obstacles to prevent seeing the accident as described by the witness?
d. Was there any noise to interfere with their hearing statements they claimed to have heard?

7. In talking to a witness or an injured employee regarding an accident always find out: Who was involved, What happened, when, where, and why it happened.

If you secure these answers, your investigation will reflect the facts as they actually exist.

ATTITUDE OF THE INVESTIGATOR OR SAFETY INSPECTOR

Be aggressive without being antagonistic. *Remember, you must obtain a clear picture of what actually happened.* You are the person to determine who is to be interviewed and what must be reported. Take suggestions from others but if you feel they will not help, continue on your own plan of investigation.

Be impartial. Your purpose is to get the facts as they actually exist. Do not try to whitewash either an employee or the company. If your facts show an accident was caused by the failure to install proper safety precautions say so—this is the only way to prevent future accidents.

Do not ask leading or negative questions, such as:

"He slipped and fell, didn't he?"

"He didn't forget to put his goggles on, did he?"

It is your function to be impartial and seek the truth facts. Your opinion is not to be reported—only the facts as they exist.

Be inquisitive. Do not rely on one man's opinion that no witnesses are available. Inquire for yourself in the vicinity of the accident and take down the name and badge number of persons. Your report should show each witness and his story, and also that no witnesses were obtained if such is the case.

Do not accept a statement as fact without checking it. If a person says something happened, ask him if he saw it personally. If so, you can place him in his position at the time of the accident so his version may be properly evaluated. However, if he says this was told to him by others, it is only hearsay and not important. Determine who told him and locate this person. Trace facts to the one who started the story. His personal knowledge may be far different from the repeated version. *Stories magnify with repetition.*

Express no opinions to those you are interviewing. Take facts as received and report them as such.

Be methodical and thorough. Attempting to move rapidly usually results in overlooking important facts. Don't stop at the first possible cause found. A more thorough investigation may reveal additional and more serious factors.

Treat each investigation alike. Do not classify them into minor or serious accidents. Handle the minor accidents properly and the more serious ones will follow naturally in proper fashion.

If you ever doubt what actually occurred, have the injured employee go over the incident step by step, or have a witness take you to his position of observation so you can better see and understand his story.

REPORT WRITING

A perfect investigation is of absolutely no value, unless it can be communicated to the person who will determine whether or not any administrative or corrective action should be taken. Because such facts are kept on record for future reference, and also routed to more than one person, most companies use written reports.

Form Reports

Where the volume of investigation justifies the practice, it is customary to set up a standard report form for reporting various incidents. In most larger companies a separate report form is provided for safety investigations.

In our company, this report first identifies the basic company location where the accident occurred; with spaces for the plant and department and the shift of the accidents. We next have spaces for identifying the employees involved and classification, age, and badge number of each employee. The next line is for the specific location of accident and the date and time of the injury.

A larger space is provided for describing the extent of injuries, and a still larger space for the causes of such injuries. Following this, approximately one-third of the page is set aside under the label, "Describe What Happened." The next labeled spaces are for identification of witnesses by name and badge number.

Approximately one-quarter of the page then is reserved for actions taken to prevent recurrence of the accident. Space is then provided for the name of the supervisor where the accident occurred, plus the signature of the safety engineer making the report and the date. The final line is for a code number for statistical purposes.

AVOIDING LIMITATIONS OF THE FORM

In providing this form to safety engineers, company representatives emphasize that the form is a guide and convenience, not a limiting, inelastic container of information. The safety engineers are instructed to fill out each and every space and encouraged to add additional relevant information. For example, they indicate the length of time the injured employee spent on the job he was handling when the accident occurred. This could indicate whether or not failure in supervision or training might be involved.

The safety engineers are also instructed to elaborate on any part of this report on the reverse side or on additional blank sheets.

The safety engineers are told not to list the witnesses merely by name and badge number, but to show what facts can be attributed to each witness. When witnesses duplicate facts from another witness, the safety engineers indicate that the second story confirms the first instead of recording the facts a second time. In such cases, they identify each witness preferably by full name and badge number. In a case where witnesses disagree, the safety engineer highlights the variance by a short notation showing the essential point of disagreement.

Negative information is listed, which prevents rebutting a later fictionalized report by such persons, and indicates the thoroughness of the investigation.

While it is not usual for signed statements to be taken from witnesses in safety investigations, the safety engineer or investigator should know how to prepare such statements to present to a witness after an interview. A statement should be prepared after an interview, when the facts have already been obtained. Don't begin an interview by asking a witness to sign a statement, because some witnesses may be reluctance to furnish information on learning the facts will be embodied in a signed statement.

SIGNED STATEMENTS

A signed statement can be justified by telling the witness that the investigator would like to record the entire story to insure he does not misquote the witness. If the investigator prepares a statement for a witness who then refuses to sign, the investigator can ask the witness to read it. The investigator then notes, above his own signature, that the witness read the statement and acknowledged it is true, but does not wish to sign any statement.

If a stenographer records and transcribes the statement, it can be in question and answer form, or in a first-person narrative statement. Where a statement is taken under emergency conditions, the investigator can write a short narrative of the facts, which is then signed by the witness.

Regardless of the type of statement, the date and place should be shown in the upper right hand corner; and the beginning should identify the witness by his name and badge number or addess. The investigator should be identified by name and title or position. The first paragraph also should mention that the statement is being made voluntarily.

The second paragraph should begin the narrative of the witness. If the witness uses bad grammar, so should the statement. This is necessary to present the actual story of the witness, without any interpretation of the investigator.

OBTAINING SIGNED STATEMENTS

The statement should close with a paragraph which reads: "I have read the above statement consisting of three pages, and find that it is correct to the best of my knowledge," followed by the signature of the witness on the right and of the investigator and other witnesses on the left.

The statement should be submitted to the witness for his reading and approval. Inci-

dentally, the investigator should make sure the witness can read. Where a witness cannot read, the statement should be read in the presence of at least one witness, and the closing paragraph reworded to show that this procedure was followed.

If the witness, upon reading the statement, finds any error, a hand-written correction should be made in ink, preferably by the witness himself; and the witness should initial the statement opposite the correction. In a statement covering more than one page, have the witness sign his initials at the bottom of each page as he reads it.

Again, investigation is fact finding. You must find the facts, and then pass on the same facts, through whatever type of report is desired, without coloring them with opinions, interpretations, explanations, or excuses. In safety investigations, of course, there is a place for interpretation and explanation. But those functions must be kept in their proper places, and not interfere with or obscure the basic facts which you obtain from your witnesses.

OFF-THE-JOB ACCIDENTS

Statistics are such boresome things
And figures rather dull.
It's hundreds, millions, billions, trillions,
Over which we mull.

But facts are facts where ere we go
Regardless of amounts,
So here's some facts on accidents,
And that's what really counts.

It isn't always big machines
With blades of sharpened steel
That rob a man of arm or leg
And make his senses reel.

Nor is it always "on the job"
Most accidents take place,
But just the opposite is true
And figures prove our case.

It's carelessness in little things
At home and on the street
Neglect in moving objects small
Away from running feet.

A makeshift ladder, sliding rugs,
Electric cords that spark
A disregard for cellar stairs
And stumbling in the dark.

Crossing where no crossings are
While looking at the sky,
Driving on a slippery road
With milestones whizzing by.

These are the things that take a toll
We all should frown upon
So watch for them when off the job,
As well as when you're on.

—Humble Pipe Line Company, Houston, Texas

A PLANNED GAS JOB
(A Skit)

CAST

Narrator ..... John Lowey, Cleveland
Superintendent of power & steam ..... John Alexander, Cleveland
Superintendent of industrial relations ..... Edward Mandry, Cleveland
Superintendent of blast furnace ..... P. Johnson, Chicago
Superintendent of coke ovens ..... H. Kelly, Chicago
Superintendent of combustion engineering ..... G. Gockstetter, Chicago
Superintendent of mechanical department ..... R. Kraus, Chicago
Safety Supervisor ..... Philip Lapish, Cleveland
Superintendent of engineering ..... C. W. Bruce, Chicago
Pipe foreman ..... W. Ryder Chicago
Demonstration of the job cast:
Pipe foreman ..... W. Ryder, Chicago
Man on manometer and telephone ..... K. McConnachie, Chicago
Safety man ..... P. Lapish, Cleveland
Four men in pit ..... P. Wright, Chicago
G. Cox, Chicago
N. Wiberg, Chicago
W. Heimer, Chicago
Man on oxygen tanks ..... J. McCaslin, Chicago

NARRATOR (Spot on narrator, alone at lectern. Stage is dark.): Gas is one of the most useful fuels available to man. It is also one of the most dangerous. Today we are going to consider a typical problem involving gas. There are a number of ways to tackle this problem, but for demonstration purposes, we shall show you how it would be tackled at the Cleveland district steel plant of Republic Steel corporation.

Similar methods are employed elsewhere in the corporation. This demonstration is a joint effort of the Cleveland and Chicago Districts of Republic Steel corporation.

(Spot fades; light comes up on meeting of committee on stage, all face audience). At the Cleveland plant, any problems involving gas are handled through our gas committee. A typical meeting of the Gas committee would look like this.

The chairman of the gas committee is the superintendent of the department in which the work is to be performed. In this case, the power superintendent, a regular member of the committee, is also chairman.

The other members are the blast furnace superintendent, the coke plant superintendent, the combustion superintendent, the mechanical superintendent, the safety supervisor, a representative from the engineering department, and the superintendent of industrial relations.

The main purposes of the committee are to eliminate, where possible, working on gas mains which are under pressure, or, to set up safe proceduses where this is not practical; and to make any recommendations that it feels necessary to insure safe operation, isolation and repair of the gas distribution system.

The committee passes on all procedures, breathing equipment, scaffolds, and gas pressures prior to starting any job. No work shall be done on any gas main under pressure, or where it is necessary to use gas masks, or on any questionable job involving gas, without the approval of this committee.

A very important function of the chairman is to see that minutes of the meeting are kept carefully. Eventually these minutes will be the "bible" of the job and they must be accurate and complete.

But the meeting is getting underway. Let's turn up the sound and hear what is going on.

POWER SUPT.: (Project map of area; point out places mentioned.) I have called this meeting to find a safe way of blanking under pressure a 24 inch gas line carrying coke oven gas from the No. 1 coke battery to the main power station. I want all of you to be aware of what is involved, so we can provide gas connections to tie in the new C boiler.

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