# Incident Investigations

After an incident, you want to look at the Who, What, When, Where, and Why of the event. Investigations help prevent future incidents and protect workers. A good incident investigation will also help with evaluating safety programs, comply with OSHA and Workers' Compensation requirements, and may provide coverage for any potential liability.

## The Investigation Team

The investigation team may vary depending on the type of incident, but ideally you should have:

- Supervisor and employee from the incident area
- EHS Professional(s)
- Engineering and/or maintenance personnel
- An equipment operator

You may also want to recruit consultants, insurance agents, or firefighters for special knowledge or an outsider's perspective.


## The Investigation Process

The investigation team may take photos from the incident site and secure the area to prevent it from being disturbed. Any photos or evidence collected must be preserved for the duration of the investigation.

The team should also interview witnesses, which includes the affected person (if they are able to be interviewed) and anyone who was nearby or may have observed the incident. Investigations ideally are conducted within 24 hours of the event.

## Determining Causes

Identifying the *root* cause of an incident will help prevent future incidents. Don't just leave it at "the employee was careless" — why were they in a rush or "careless"? What influenced that behavior? Try using the 5 WHYs to determine:

**Proximate Cause:** The event which is closest or immediately responsible for causing the observed result. Most investigations stop here, but there may be factors that contributed to the proximate cause!

**Contributing Cause:** A cause that influenced the effect by increasing its likelihood, accelerating the effect in time, or affected the severity of the consequences

**Root Cause:** An initiating cause which leads to an outcome or effect of interest. The root cause leads to proximate causes. A Root Cause Analysis uses cause and effect approaches by asking "why" questions to identify one or more low-level conditions that lead to a failure. The cause at the lowest level (when "why" no longer can be answers) is identified as the root cause(s).