



Managing Risk: support for business

Accident investigation

Every workplace has the potential for serious accidents. Even if there are good safety systems, protocols and procedures in place. Most incidents happen due to something no one foresaw happening, or there were a series of events leading up to an accident. Conducting an investigation following an accident or 'near miss' allows a business to analyse and improve the way it works.

While there's no statutory requirement, accident investigation is good health and safety practice. Investigation allows an organisation to examine an accident's cause, which is often down to less obvious or more deep-rooted problems. Investigations often lead to changes in working practices or procedures, further reducing the risk of a similar accident happening again, and making sure any statutory requirements are met.

Accident investigation: the key steps

1. **Make the site safe and isolate the area where the incident happened**
2. **Interview witnesses and victims as soon as possible, and record their statements**
3. **Take photographs of the site**
4. **Safeguard and remove any relevant evidence from the site**
5. **When you've gathered all the evidence, you can investigate the true cause of the accident**
6. **Review any existing risk assessments, current health and safety policies and any previous reviews. You'll also need to evaluate training or supervisory methods and safe working practices, revise machinery or equipment guarding and inspect maintenance routines**
7. **Review the emergency actions following the accident and make any necessary changes**

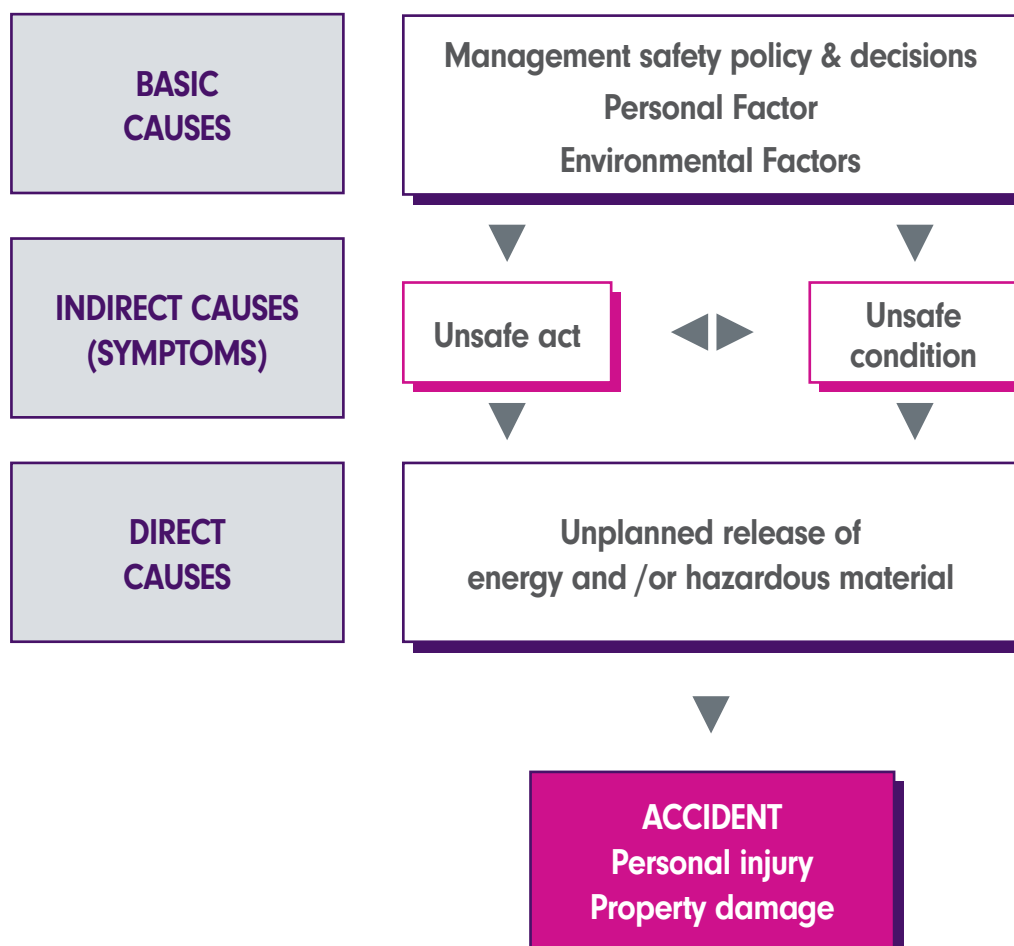


There are useful tools available for accident investigation. Two key tools include an investigation activities flow chart and fault tree analysis illustrated on the following pages.



Fault tree analysis

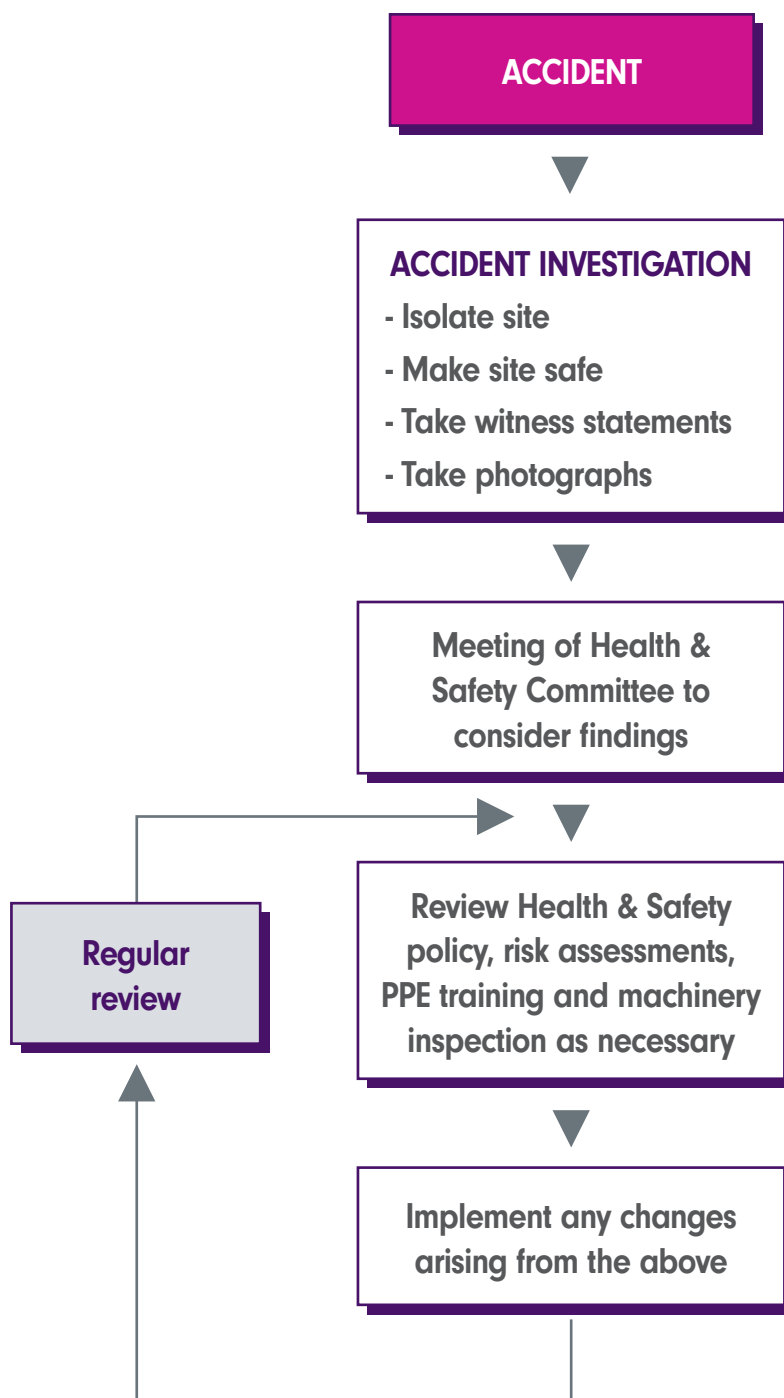
This basic fault tree analysis shows how to trace the cause of an accident. Often this can be due to an indirect cause such as poor health and safety management, rather than a direct cause such as an explosion or machinery malfunction.





Investigation activities flow chart

The second diagram illustrates the basic accident investigation process. It shows the actions following an accident and the need for the regular review of training, risk assessments and working practices.





Accident investigation: the key steps

It's vital you follow the procedures shown in these diagrams. Gathering information from witnesses is a fact-finding process and it's important to make sure any information obtained from witness interviews is relevant:

- **Clearly identify all witnesses, including reluctant bystanders**
- **Conduct interviews as soon as possible after the accident**
- **Make sure witnesses do not talk to each other before they're interviewed**
- **Take detailed notes during interviews**
- **Do not use leading questions**
- **Prepare statements and ask witnesses to sign them**

In summary, accident investigation is not a finger-pointing exercise or a blame game. It's a proactive and positive way to enhance the quality of existing controls and improve health and safety.