

Incident Investigation Procedure Guide

A step-by-step procedure for investigating workplace incidents under Ontario's OHSA — from immediate response through corrective action.

Incident Investigation

OHSA

Root Cause Analysis

MOL Reporting

Supervisor Duties

Documentation

When a workplace incident occurs, a thorough investigation is not optional — it is a legal obligation under Ontario's OHSA. Employers must investigate incidents that cause or could cause serious injury or death. The goal is not to assign blame but to identify root causes and prevent the next incident from happening.

What Qualifies as an Incident?

An incident includes any event resulting in injury, illness, property damage, or loss of work time. **Near-misses must also be investigated** — they are warnings that something in your system is failing. If you are waiting for an injury to occur before you investigate, you are already too late.

Immediate Response — First 24 Hours

- **Secure the Scene:** Stop activities in the affected area; prevent further hazards; preserve the scene as evidence
- **Provide Medical Attention:** Ensure immediate care for anyone injured — this is always the first priority
- **Notify Authorities:** Report serious incidents to the Ministry of Labour (MOL) within **4 hours** of discovery
- **Gather Information:** Interview witnesses immediately while details are fresh; take photos; collect physical evidence

The Six-Step Investigation Process

Steps 1–3: Gather and Analyze

- **Step 1 — Form the Team:** Supervisor, worker representative, safety officer, and external expert if needed
- **Step 2 — Gather Facts:** Review incident report, witness statements, scene conditions, equipment, and procedures
- **Step 3 — Identify Root Causes:** Look beyond the immediate cause; ask 'why' multiple times to find underlying factors

Steps 4–6: Act and Close Out

- **Step 4 — Determine Corrective Actions:** Identify what can change to prevent recurrence; assign responsibility and timelines
- **Step 5 — Document Findings:** Create a detailed written report with findings, recommendations, and follow-up plan
- **Step 6 — Implement and Monitor:** Execute corrective actions; track effectiveness; communicate results to all workers

Key Principles of Effective Investigation

- Investigations are for **prevention** — not punishment or blame
- Maintain confidentiality of witness statements where appropriate
- Involve workers in the investigation process — they have critical context
- Complete the investigation within **30 days** of the incident
- Report results to the JHSC and communicate outcomes to all workers
- Follow up on corrective actions — an investigation without follow-through is worthless

Documentation Requirements

- Incident report completed by supervisor within required timeframe
- MOL notification made within 4 hours for critical injuries or fatalities
- Written witness statements obtained and retained on file
- Photos and physical evidence documented
- Root cause analysis documented with supporting rationale
- Corrective action plan documented with assigned names and deadlines
- Final report shared with JHSC and posted for worker awareness

Every incident is a failure of a system — not just a lapse by an individual. Investigate thoroughly, fix the root cause, and communicate the outcome. The next worker's safety depends on what you do after this one gets hurt.