

Incident Investigation: Interview Guidelines

Department: Risk Management and Response

Program: Incident Investigation

Owner: Program Manager

Authority: ES&H Manual, Chapter 28, Incident Investigation¹

The following interview format is useful for collecting information to complete the required any required reporting such as the Incident Investigation Form (SU-17B).²

Basics

- Conduct interviews as soon as possible after the incident
- Focus on interviewing persons most directly involved with the incident
- Be respectful of the interviewee's physical and emotional state; if the person has suffered an injury or is in shock, ensure that medical help is available

Initiating an Interview

1. Introduce yourself and ask the person if they can help you determine what happened.
2. Put the interviewee at ease by
 - Explaining that getting the facts may help prevent a recurrence
 - Explaining that information is confidential and on a need-to-know basis only
 - Remaining cordial and professional even if the interviewee is not cooperative
3. If possible, move the interview to a location with enough privacy to
 - Remove distractions
 - Maintain confidentiality
 - Keep interviewee from being influenced or pressured by others

Developing the Narrative

1. **Collect facts.** Ask the interviewee to relate the events of the incident in his or her own words. Allow the person to complete each statement; do not fill silences with leading questions.
2. **Construct a timeline.** Pay close attention to the testimony in order to establish a timeline and identify critical elements for future clarification or expansion.
3. **Clarify critical elements.**
 - Based on testimony, prompt the person to elaborate on critical information
 - Ask open-ended questions to help clarify important information
 - Avoid using emotive or judgmental language

1 *SLAC Environment, Safety, and Health Manual* (SLAC-I-720-0A29Z-001), Chapter 28, "Incident Investigation", <http://www-group.slac.stanford.edu/esh/general/accidents/policies.htm>

2 Incident Investigation: Incident Investigation Form (SU-17B) (SLAC-I-730-0A21J-014), <http://www-group.slac.stanford.edu/esh/eshmanual/references/incidentsFormInvestigateSU17B.pdf> | [.doc \(Word\)](#)

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- Do not prompt interviewees to speculate. Record only what the interviewee considers fact.
4. **Ask control questions.** Ask questions for which you already know the answer to give you a basis for evaluating the reliability of the interviewee's testimony.
 5. **Confirm accuracy.** Periodically summarize events for the interviewee to confirm the information has been accurately recorded.

Collecting Additional Information

1. Once the narrative has been developed, ask the person how the incident could have been prevented.
2. Thank the interviewee for cooperating with the investigation
3. Exchange contact information so that both parties can follow up; the interviewer may have additional questions and the interviewee may remember additional details after the interview is concluded.