

At the start of an investigation it may be obvious what has happened to whom, but not necessarily **why**, nor who else may be involved. Complete information comes from the investigation process which may take days, weeks or months.

Do not prejudge, but maintain an open mind throughout the investigation. This is critical if a fair and unbiased investigation is to be carried out.

Remember that there is more than one viewpoint (often many) as to what has occurred, and there may be information that conflicts and lacks corroboration.

The sooner after the event, that the investigation begins the better. Memories are fresh and any physical factors that may have contributed are less likely to have been disturbed.

You are collecting information and evidence. What relevance this has on your final outcome may not be evident straight away, but will become more obvious as the investigation progresses.

Now to look at some practical tools that we can use.

For example, when investigating a possible chemical exposure to solvents the following can help.

A screening questionnaire can be used to identify the more likely individuals such as 'Questionnaire 16' * which is used for screening employees with a potential or known exposure. If the criteria are exceeded then a full health investigation should be carried out. Consisting of

- a comprehensive questionnaire,
- biological monitoring
- workplace investigations
- enquiries into hobbies, recreational activities
- and finally asking if there are any significant events happening within their lives at this point in time.

Questions must also be asked regarding other possible causes of the higher scores. For example other medical causes, any recreational drugs being used – (legal or otherwise!!), and last but not least, any trauma to the head such as concussion or being knocked out.

For all investigations, the use of a structured comprehensive questionnaire and investigation form ensures all the required information is collected and important questions are not missed out. It also standardises the investigation which will allow results to be compared to others if more than one person is being investigated. It gives more validity to your investigation and therefore if epidemiological studies are being considered, trends and patterns of illness are more quickly identified.

In any investigation the use of prompt sheets that guide us in asking the critical questions are extremely helpful when carrying out an investigation. ***The better the collection of evidence the more accurate the resulting answer will be.***

Assistance with this can be obtained by contacting us direct.

* *This will need to be administered by an occupational health professional to ensure correct interpretation of the results.*

Recommendations to prevent re-occurrence.

This is probably the most important objective of the investigation process. Once the true accident causes have been established, actions must be taken to prevent re-occurrence.

Recommendations / actions may be specific to the company or may apply to the general industry group. It can be of benefit to let all other like companies know via an industry newsletter, an ITO or by writing in one of the national safety publications.

Having implemented all recommendations then it is pertinent to review the outcome of these actions after a reasonable time frame. These can vary greatly depending on the action required. If noise level surveys are required these are required 5 yearly. Hearing tests are required annually.

In summary.

Using a structured format that has been customised for your workplace but is inclusive of information from the industry group in general will always result in a more comprehensive investigation.

The personnel carrying out the investigation need good 'people skills' being able to relate well and able to gain the confidence of the staff involved.

Documentation needs to be clear and concise with supporting photographs, measurements, and where relevant, samples of damaged goods or plant.

We are able to offer training to assist workplace staff in gaining investigation skills and knowledge.