

# Accident Investigation

Presentation to the Revitalising Network  
30 September 2008

# A wise man said...

“On the occasion of every accident that befalls you, remember to turn to yourself and inquire what power you have to turn it to use”

Epictetus 60-120AD

# Tips on investigation

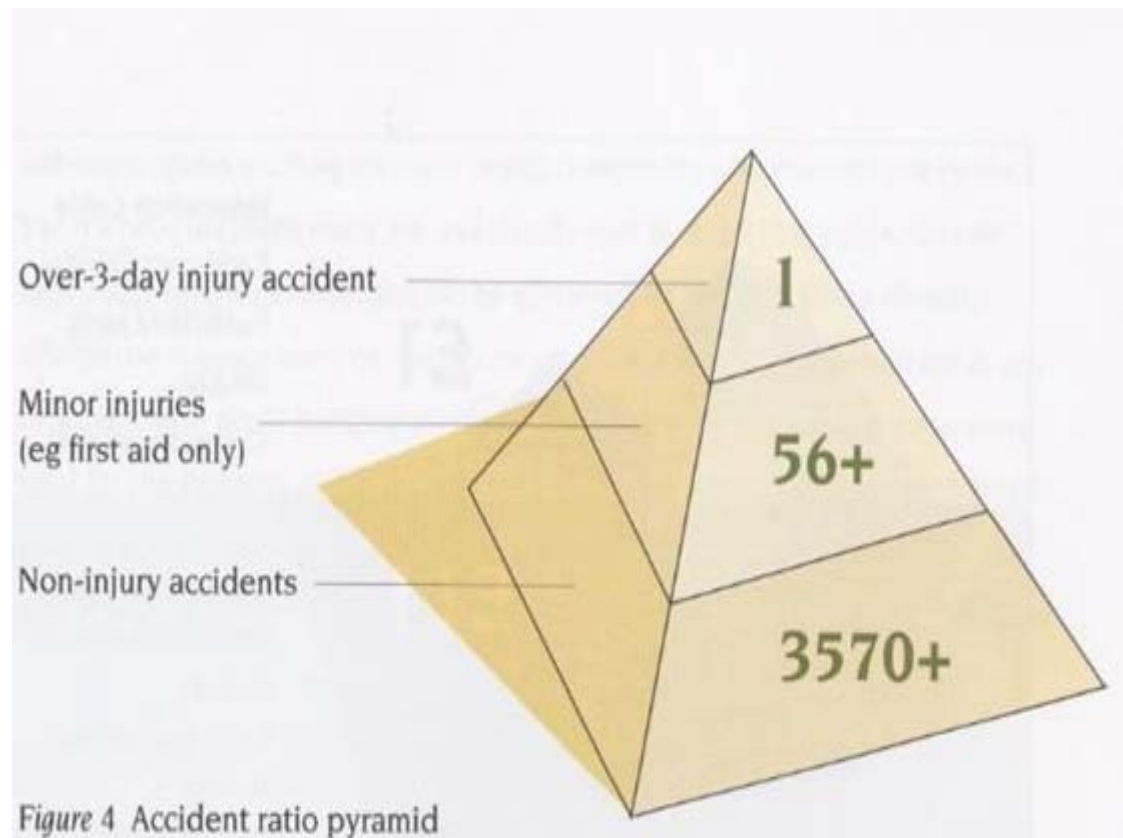
- Write a set of investigator rules and design a report layout. Scope and content are more structured and auditable
- Ensure the Board are aware of the reasons for doing it this way and the benefits
- Gets sign up to the scope and methodology of the investigation
- Set and maintain deadlines for investigation and report preparation. Same shift for minor accidents

# Investigation Teams

- Line manager and safety representative as a minimum
- Work to an investigation protocol agreed by the safety committee and the Board
- Report signed off by all investigators
- Very serious accidents or incidents to be taken out of line management hands and put in special investigation team hands. Criteria should be set for this.

# HSE Accident Pyramid HSG 96

(After Heinrich, Bird and Germain)



I keep six honest serving-men  
(They taught me all I knew);  
Their names are What and Why and When  
And How and Where and Who.

Rudyard Kipling

# Objectives

- The objective of any investigation is to determine what happened, where it happened, when it happened, how it happened, who it happened to and finally why it happened. “5WH”
- The “why” question is the most often poorly dealt with issue. Investigators either have mind sets that preclude objective and reasoned investigation or always blame equipment or employee behaviours.
- The investigator’s task is not to apportion blame but establish the root cause of the event based on objective analysis of all the facts.

# Effective investigations will:-

- Describe what happened. Thorough investigations will clear through conflicting accounts and arrive at an accurate statement of what really happened.
- Determine the real causes. These are not necessarily immediate but may be underlying ones. The causes may not be work related.
- Establish the real risks. Good investigators will determine whether there is a significant likelihood of a recurrence or the potential of greater consequential losses in future.

# Effective investigations will:-

- Create a future prevention strategy. Only if there is a competent investigation carried out, ensuring adequate controls are in place, will you be able confidently to plan, organise and control the risk portfolio of the business.
- Demonstrate concern and interest. People, both employed, associated with the organisation and customers, are the biggest assets the company has. Prompt, fair and competently conducted investigations, involving the injured and their safety representatives, aid employee relations, demonstrate concern, leadership and reduce the possibility of further accidents or losses

# Conclusions and Recommendations

- Ensure these indicate exactly what must be done, by whom and by what date.
- Use the organisation's priority system if there is one, if not set one up.
- Never give an action to anyone who has not been consulted or involved.
- Make sure all recommendations are followed up and closed out.

# Prioritisation

- One site priority system with outputs that cover all bases, health, safety, security, fire, quality, environment, customer care etc.
  - A            Now! Immediate!
  - B            3 days
  - C            7 days
  - D            28 days
  - E            Next scheduled shut down

Major Cause of Failure to Risk Manage

**NO  
Closure**

# Difficulties for Investigators

- Fear of regulator
- Higher management – loss of face, accusations of incompetent oversight
- Shooting the messenger
- Insurer
- Politics of telling someone they've got it wrong
- Pulling punches – lack of rigour

# Lessons I've learned

- Most industrial accident investigation reports I've read are not worth the paper they are written on
- Most blame the accident victim rather than determine the root cause
- They often reveal safety specialists ignorance of the law and therefore understanding of duties and responsibilities
- Bad company investigations mislead defence lawyers and push up criminal and civil costs

Any questions?