

Know Who Will Gather Crash Site Information

Once the organization has determined it will investigate a crash, managers need to know how they will get the information that's necessary for an effective investigation. Often, an employee who is at the scene is the best method. However, if that is not possible managers need to decide if they will send a company representative - a manager or other employee with the necessary skills and tools, or perhaps a qualified third party - to the scene to collect information. Consider the following.

Is anyone's personal safety at risk? - Anyone collecting information at a crash scene is exposed to hazards. Usually, the greatest hazard is other traffic. Sometimes, the crash results in a downed power line, release of hazardous substances, or terrible injuries that are traumatic to see. Once the scene is "made safe" those hazards decline, but until then there is no sense exposing your employee to further avoidable risks.

Can an employee who is already at the scene collect necessary information? - If they are not shaken up or injured and they have the necessary training and tools, an employee who is at the site is often the safest and most efficient way to collect basic information. However, if the incident is serious it may deserve someone with more specialized skills and tools.

Do travel risks outweigh potential benefits? - Sending someone to the crash scene exposes him or her to travel-related hazards. Do the potential benefits of collecting crash information outweigh the risks of collecting it? For example, if a crash occurs because of bad weather or road conditions, there would be little sense sending someone else to drive and investigate in those same conditions.

How long will it take to get to the crash scene? - Unless there is a fatality, most crash scenes are cleaned up quickly - often an hour or less. Information that is critical to an investigation can quickly disappear. If the time it takes for someone to travel to the crash scene is greater than the time the information is going to be available, there is limited value in sending someone to do that. However, if you need to locate and interview witnesses and collect physical evidence, it is better to get that done sooner rather than later.

Can you rely on accessing police (or other agency) reports? - There are three reasons why it is unwise to presume you will be able to access police or other agency reports in a timely manner. First, agencies cannot release information that may jeopardize their investigation, especially while it is in progress. Second, requirements in the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* restrict the ability of agencies to share report information with any employer. Third, police do not attend nor investigate all crashes. If police do not attend, it is unlikely other agencies will investigate the crash. There may be no investigation report to share.

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Conduct and Considerations When At The Crash Scene

Increasingly, if an organization wants to collect information that's essential for their investigation, they will have to rely on their own resources to do so. Whether your employee who is already at the scene collects information, or you send another representative to the scene, have them take the following steps to gain the cooperation of police and others who are at the scene.

- Do not drive onto the scene. Park on the shoulder or a side road so your vehicle does not restrict visibility or access by others.
- Wear appropriate safety gear (hi-vis vest, protective eyewear, footwear, headwear, gloves).
- Avoid any actions that will increase the significant risk already there.
- Identify who you are, and why you are there (collecting information for employer's investigation).
- Be respectful of police protocols and emergency responders at the site.
- Do not hinder the work of police or other officials in the work they need to do. Do not move or destroy potential evidence.
- Be cooperative and helpful.

Police and other agency representatives have considerable information gathering and investigation expertise. With a little cooperation and the right attitude, you can make police receptive to your presence, learn from them and perhaps get their help discovering some key facts. Ask if there is anything you can do to help them.

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