



HELPING BUILD
BETTER CITIES™

Understanding the 5 W's and 1 H in Incident Reporting

Incident reports are essential tools for improving workplace safety, identifying hazards, and preventing future occurrences. A thorough and effective report answers six key questions:

Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How. These elements ensure that the report is complete, objective, and useful for analysis.

1. Who

It identifies all individuals connected to the incident:

- **Victims:** Those directly affected.
- **Witnesses:** Individuals who observed the incident.
- **First Responders:** Those who provided immediate assistance.

This clearly outlines each person's role and involvement without assigning blame.

2. What

This describes exactly what happened:

- Include specific actions, events, or conditions.
- Focus on facts and observable details.

This section establishes a clear understanding of the sequence of events and helps identify what went wrong.

3. When

Records the exact date and time of the incident:

- Include a timeline if possible.
- Note when each key event occurred.

This provides accurate timing that is crucial for identifying contributing factors and coordinating follow-up actions.

4. Where

This specifies the exact location of the incident:

- Include site names, departments, or equipment involved.
- Be as detailed as possible.

This helps identify environmental or situational factors that may have played a role in the incident.

Striving for Safety Excellence

5. Why

Explain the reasons behind the incident, based on available evidence:

- Focus on contributing factors such as unsafe conditions, human error, or procedural gaps.
- Avoid assumptions or assigning blame.

This section supports root cause analysis and helps guide corrective actions.

6. How

Detail how the incident unfolded:

- Describe the process or chain of events.
- Connect the dots between the other five elements.

This ties everything together and provides a comprehensive view for analysis and prevention.

Using the 5 W's and 1 H framework ensures that incident reports are:

- Thorough
- Objective
- Actionable

Encouraging consistent use of this method improves safety culture and supports continuous improvement.

