

Principles for Conducting Incident/Event Analyses at LBNL

In evaluating safety related incidents and other adverse events:

- We do not seek to blame individuals
- We look beyond the individual's actions to understand underlying organizational issues
- We seek to learn from both the positive as well as negative actions that occur
- We will share what we learn so that others can benefit from our analyses
- Incident analysis will follow the same collaborative, analytical approach we use in our science
- Incident analysis will be supported by senior management and take place in a timely manner
- Incident analysis results will be openly made available to the Lab community.

These principles are based on:

Berkeley Lab is a learning institution – we learn from each other, from our science, from our partners, and from our successes and mistakes. We strive for uncompromising operational and safety performance while producing outstanding science. Yet adverse events, accidents, and injuries can happen from time to time. When they do occur, they present us with a clear choice; either we can learn from them and improve our operational and safety performance, or we can regress by blaming people for errors they made and impose additional requirements. Experience teaches us that the way we handle these events can have an immense impact on our Laboratory culture, so it is critically important that we respond constructively.

Our goal then is to get the most value we can from our response to adverse events. Typically, there are strong pressures to find the simple explanations and obvious causes. But experience also shows us that these events are always more complex and are rarely attributable to just the actions of the individuals involved. Our incident analysis process must result in obtaining the most useful understanding of all of the potential lessons to be learned. To do this, incident analyses need to focus on understanding not just the direct causes, but also the context of decisions, why people did what they did, and what underlying organizational strengths and weaknesses may have been present.

Our incident analysis process must also include the goal to identify and understand positive actions of people that contributed to mitigating the adverse impacts. Some of the most significant opportunities to improve are found when we recognize and support the great value of human creativity and initiative.

When incident analyses are needed in our divisions and operating units, we must provide strong, clear and consistent direction that we expect a full account in a timely manner that includes all of the important lessons that we might learn. Only through this deeper understanding comes the ability to develop effective and sustainable solutions that really will improve operations and safety. In addition, we must demonstrate that this full explanation is in all of our interests. Our goal is to find the most effective opportunities to improve, wherever they may be in the organization – including ourselves. The purpose of the incident analysis is not to identify blame; it is to identify opportunities to improve.

To truly take advantage of these opportunities we must be willing to share what we learn in an open, constructive, and trusting manner. By demonstrating a commitment to share this information, we also reinforce our commitment towards a more positive Laboratory culture.

In our environment where learning at both the individual and organizational level is a core value, developing in-depth understanding of adverse events is simply part of our collaborative approach towards continually striving for improvement in both safety and operational excellence.