

Accident Investigation – 4 P`s

Evidence susceptible to the recollection of more than one witness is considered fragile when one person's thoughts are conveyed to another. When people have enough time to rationalise what they have seen, the continuity of evidence obtained through witnesses may be lost or broken.

Also fragile is physical evidence e.g. parts of plant or equipment, which are dismantled by an untrained or unauthorised party after the accident. This may be done with intent of supporting the investigation but can sometimes result in the loss of evidence.

EFFECTIVE ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION



Accident investigators will often discover fragile evidence in the following categories

- People
- Positions
- Parts
- Papers

People are the source of sensory witness evidence. Their evidence is recorded through memory and its accuracy is subject to forgetfulness, rationalisation, influence from others and personal conflicts over what they may have seen.

Positions refer to the physical relationship, location and sequence of events as they occurred pre, during and post the incident. The post-incident position of evidence is particularly fragile since such evidence is often removed or displaced by emergency response teams. Positions are also subject to displacement by investigators, bystanders, clean up teams or local personnel who wish to return to normal work activities.

Parts can refer to any element of plant or equipment. Post-accident damage, displacement, contamination, disassembly or loss or theft may destroy valuable evidence.

Papers refer to any operating procedures, safe systems of work, training records, risk assessment, maintenance records, inspection reports, design specifications etc. that may have a bearing on the incident. Paper evidence may be lost or occasionally, amended after an accident.

Swift control and securing of the accident scene together with prompt information gathering and investigation will help to minimise the fragility of the available evidence.