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Managing an Accident Investigation Board Part 2 of 3: Lessons from the Site Office

Introduction

This Operating Experience Summary (OES) is the second of a three-part series titled “*Managing an Accident Investigation Board*.” It provides information that supports field organizations in successfully managing Department of Energy (DOE) Accident Investigation Board (AIB) responsibilities. AIB guidance and training exists within the Department and is routinely provided to AIB candidates. However, due to the immediacy and high level of rigor that is required by the process, and the low frequency in which AIBs are convened, subject matter experts and managers called to support an investigation can benefit from continued awareness about potential process pitfalls and good practices in executing their responsibilities. This second part of the OES series considers AIB lessons learned from the federal Site Office perspective. The other two parts focus on the roles and perspectives of the AIB Chairpersons and Board Members.

Background

From December of 2022 to August 2023, three serious accidents occurred which met the criteria of *DOE O 225.1B, Accident Investigations*. AIBs were chartered by the Office of Science (SC) for the SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory Electrical Shock Event (December 27, 2022), the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory Construction Injury Event (May 25, 2023), and the Oak Ridge Reservation Management Tree Felling Fatality Event (August 11, 2023). The experience of chartering and executing these AIBs provides a rich collection of lessons that can benefit other organizations in performing this critical task and ensuring high quality investigation outcomes. In the spirit of being a learning organization, the SC Office of the Deputy Director for Operations and the Office of Environment, Health, Safety and Security (EHSS) Accident Prevention and Investigation Program (APIP) Manager collaborated to develop Lessons Learned from these three recent event investigations and share them with the DOE Complex.

Site Office Operating Experience with an AIB

Lessons Learned and/or Good Practices Identified

- 1. Site Offices benefit from having a Primer or Summary of AIB expectations.** Site Offices noted the benefit of having roles and responsibilities clearly defined at the outset, with increased complications when this was not available. EHSS will develop a primer on hosting FAIBs to summarize the expected support actions to help the process work more smoothly.

**Site Office Operating
Experience with an AIB**

Lessons Learned and/or Good Practices Identified

2. **AIB Chairs should Contact Site Office before arrival** on site and **continue clear communications** throughout investigation.

- a. Early contact with the Site eliminates many hurdles associated with the arrival and logistics needs of the AIB including but not limited to:
 - 1) Site access/badging, parking, and building access,
 - 2) Main Facility meeting area in which the Board will work in (i.e., "war room"),
 - 3) Office supplies (flip charts, post it notes, pens, markers, tape, scissors, etc.),
 - 4) Interview rooms, and
 - 5) System for tracking requested contracts, documents, procedures, and other administrative items.
- b. While on-site, the Board needs to communicate their needs often to the Site Office. This enables timely responses and limits frustrations. Event scene access may present additional challenges (e.g., lockout of energy sources, PPE, briefings, access to and/or through other organizations) and needs to be considered.

3. Be aware that **Multiple investigations** and reporting requirements can burden a Site Office.

- a. It may be likely that other federal and state entities such as DOE Office of Enterprise Assessment (EA), Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Labor & Industries or local law enforcement may want and/or be required to investigate. This can easily overwhelm Site Office staff personnel as well as the contractor and/or subcontractor involved in the event.
- b. The Chair may be a valuable ally for the Site Office to help identify means in which to limit the number of concurrent investigations, especially those conducted by representatives within DOE (e.g., EA).
- c. Remember that ORPS and CAIRS reporting may also be required.

4. Plan for the significant amount of time that a **Factual Accuracy** requires.

- a. A comprehensive and effective factual accuracy (FA) review is essential to the integrity of the report. The FA review will need to be done in person, will require an on-site proctor, and may require a significant amount of time.
- b. Site Offices should work with the FAIB Chair to identify the most efficient ways to conduct this review. Support is generally provided by site office staff, but Board members may be able to assist, especially if they are local.

5. Ensure DOE legal counsel is engaged for response to issues raised by **Legal**

- a. Legal representatives for the contractor, subcontractor or personnel involved in the accident are likely to have interest in the event, which may result in additional obligations for the Site Office.

**Site Office Operating
Experience with an AIB**

Representatives from
third parties.

Lessons Learned and/or Good Practices Identified

- b. Legal requirements or restrictions may hinder or prohibit certain AIB objectives such as conducting interviews or gaining access to physical or administrative evidence.
- c. The Site Office should always confer with their legal team to provide counsel as may be needed, and consider, with the AIB Chair, additional assistance from DOE General Counsel if appropriate.

6. Plan in advance to address **variability in IT systems** between the Site Office, Contractor, and AIB.

- a. Site Offices should support the Board's need to collaborate and share information, taking steps to address any variations in IT infrastructure that would limit collaboration and information sharing between the Site Office, contractor (or laboratory), and AIB. Sites should establish a document sharing platform (e.g., Teams, SharePoint) prior to the Board convening on site if possible.

7. **Provide continuity between the AIB and the Site Office.**

- a. To ease the burden on Site personnel and eliminate potential duplicity, have a single point of contact from the Board make all requests (administrative or other) to a single point of contact from the Site Office.

8. **Be prepared for the Departure of the Board**

- a. At the end of the AIB site visit, the Board will transfer custody of all physical evidence obtained during the investigation back to the Site Office. The Site Office will be required to formally accept all evidence and provide a secured area in which those items may be stored.

The Office of Environment, Health, Safety and Security (EHSS), Office of ES&H Reporting and Analysis publishes OES articles to promote safety throughout the DOE Complex through the exchange of lessons-learned information among DOE facilities and program offices.

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OES Series: Managing an Accident Investigation Board (AIB)

This OES is part of a series of articles focused on recent operating experience and recommended practices in the managing an AIB under DOE O 225.1A. The series includes the following three parts:

Part 1: *Lessons for Board Members*

Part 2: *Lessons from the Site Office (this OES document)*

Part 3: *Lessons for the Chair*