



Learning from Incidents: Protips Part 1

Over the almost 20 years that vPSI has been in business, the company’s consultants have reviewed tens of thousands of incident investigations and have participated in many more. This perhaps unique experience provides a perspective that would be difficult, if not impossible, to replicate in any single organization. This article is the first in a series that will attempt to distill the accumulated knowledge of vPSI’s consultants into “protips” that will be of value to those involved in investigating and learning from incidents. Right up front, it is worth noting that the recommendations you are about to read apply not only to incidents (called Unplanned Events in vPSI nomenclature), that attract the “safety” label, but are also applicable to any instance where something goes wrong and the organization doesn’t want it to happen again.

Stephen Covey ranked “Begin with the end in mind” as Habit #2 of highly effective people, but in



learning from incidents, this should actually be consideration #1. The investigation is about to consume a considerable amount of the organization’s time, energy and resources in response to the incident, so it is critical that there is clarity about what the objective of this expenditure is. Philosophically, most would agree that the goal is to prevent it from happening again. The question, though, is what is the “it”?

The vPSI System™ approach is to think of the incident in terms of four separate and related elements, the H-E-A-R components, which represent: Harm, the Unplanned Event, Acts, and Reasons.

In this simple incident model, the target of the investigation’s output is the Unplanned Event, and the objective is to either prevent it from reoccurring or reduce its probability to a point where the exposure is inside the organization’s risk tolerance threshold.

Traditionally, organizations have often focused on the “Harm” component of an incident, for example a recordable injury or a hazardous liquids spill. But it is possible,

and quite common, to have an incident with little or no Harm. Suppose a person falls down a short flight of stairs and lands flat on his face. He gets up, brushes off his clothes, looks around to make sure nobody is watching, and goes about his business. This was still an Unplanned Event, and although there was no associated Harm, there certainly was reasonable scope for Harm had circumstances been only slightly different.

Harm	Actual or potential consequences resulting from the unplanned event
Unplanned Event	The point where things diverged from expectations
Acts	What caused or allowed an unplanned event to occur
Reasons	Why acts were committed or conditions existed

An organization that focuses only on the Harm may miss the opportunity to prevent a future, similar, Unplanned Event, and the employee involved may be less lucky next time. Consequence management is planning for the Unplanned Event to reoccur instead of preventing it from happening again. Actions directed at the Unplanned Event are much more powerful than attempting to address the vast spectrum of possible downstream consequences.

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H-E-A-R SAY

Fit for Duty - Fitness for Work

When someone asks if you have a Fit for Duty (FFD) program within your organization, what is your response? In many cases, it will be along the lines of: “We have a drug and alcohol program.” Is it that easy? Are they interchangeable? Do you know what Fit for Duty means in your business context?

Rick Theriau, Director of vPSI’s Canadian operations, worked with Energy Safety Canada (ESC) to develop FFD recommended practices, including this definition: *A condition in which an employee’s physical, physiological, and psychological state enables them to continuously perform assigned tasks safely.*

This definition includes:

- ◇ Physical requirements – Physical Demands Analysis, vision, hearing, etc.
- ◇ Physiological condition – fatigue, use and influence of alcohol and drugs, workplace exposures, etc.
- ◇ Psychological condition – commitment, risk tolerance, emotional state, culture, etc.

Fit for Duty is a comprehensive umbrella program that can assist your organization to incorporate existing policies and programs to evaluate the people side of a business. Ideally, an FFD program aligns with organization-specific programs to provide front-line supervisors the knowledge and support to confidently assist their employees with the companies’ expectations, programs, and systems.

When a supervisor asks an employee if they are Fit for Duty at the be-

Fitness for Duty Strategies Could Include		
Physical Demands Analysis	Violence Prevention	Workers Compensation
Pre-employment Suitability	Harassment Prevention	Modified Duties
Fatigue Management Program	Respectful Workplace	Return to Work
Workplace Exposures	Working Alone	Investigations
Health and Hygiene	Distractions	Wellness
Behaviour Based Safety	Hours of Service (DOT Logs)	Competency Management
Supervisory Training	Manager Training	Employee Training
House Rules	Disciplinary Action	Communications

ginning of the shift and the response is yes, how is it possible for the employee to subsequently have a human performance incident? In reality, each person is constantly somewhere on the spectrum of being Fit for Duty. Depending on the physical, physiological, and psychological effects of what is going on around the person, there is constant change. A phone call from a loved one, a discussion with the employee’s supervisor, a change in the perception of one of the other workers, and decisions being made after physical exertion or exposure to a workplace haz-

ard can all change a person’s location on the FFD spectrum, therefore affecting their ability to correctly make the next decision. As our daily work continues, we are also exposed to the circadian rhythm of our bodies. We have times when we are switched on and other times when we are not as mentally alert. Asking a competent worker to complete a task when they are fully alert is trivial, while asking that same competent worker to complete the same task near the end of their shift could be asking for an unplanned event to occur.

The International Association of Oil & Gas Producers (IOGP) created a set of 9 Life Saving Rules (LSRs) to provide consistency between organizations. These were expanded to 10 by Energy Safety Canada to include Fit for Duty. Several companies have adopted a version of the ESC “Life Saving Rules”.



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Fit for Duty - Fitness for Work

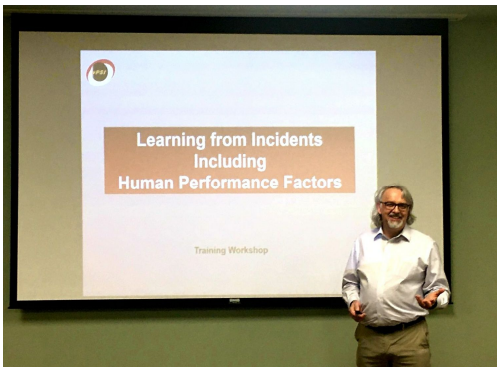
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Fit for Duty is a comprehensive inclusion of programs and systems that may already be in place in many organizations. It allows for each organization to customize how it will communicate and implement the FFD approach, while providing the needed skills for supervisors and managers to evaluate the assignment of tasks and responsibilities to competent workers.



FIT FOR DUTY

We're Back, Baby!

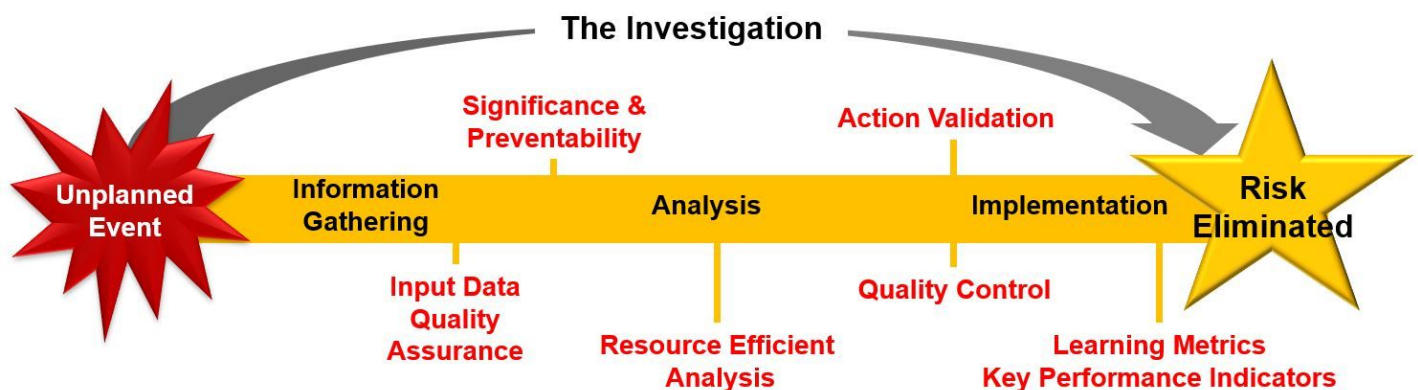


We are delighted to announce that in-person vPSI workshops are back! Beginning in April 2021, our Instructors are back on the road delivering the benefits of vPSI face-to-face. Shown here is vPSI Director and Co-Founder Norman Ritchie delivering our foundation level 1-day training workshop "Learning From Incidents" which has seen a ground up revision over the last year. While the vPSI concepts remain fundamentally unchanged and just as efficient and effective as always, the workshop has been "modernized" and the Human Performance Factors section expanded, recognizing the increased extent to which human frailty is being acknowledged as a causal factor in incidents.

What's an Investigation, Anyway?

Ask a group of safety / risk practitioners if they have received investigation training and the vast majority will raise their hands. Dig a little deeper though, and the situation becomes more nuanced. Further questioning reveals that most have only been exposed to formal training in the analysis portion of investigation, in other words looking at the "whys" of an Unplanned Event. Very few have been trained in post-event information gathering, apart from what they have gleaned by watching CSI on TV, and fewer yet have any training in validation of the output of their analyses.

This is what an investigation looks like in the vPSI System™:



A vPSI investigation is everything that occurs between the Unplanned Event and either the revealed risk being eliminated, or its associated probability being reduced to the extent that it now lies within the organization's risk tolerance.



Combining Business With Pleasure

There are few opportunities for travel at the moment, so we're opening up the archive to take a wistful look at past adventures...

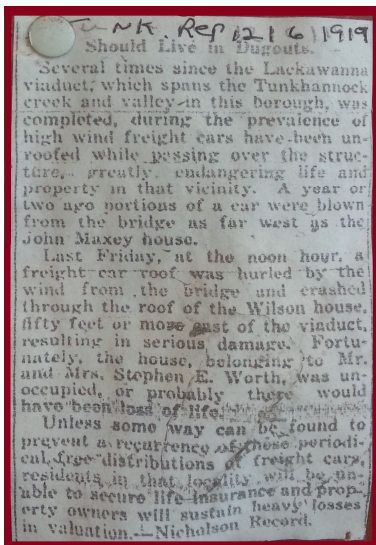
In 2012, while in Tunkhannock, PA, delivering training in the fundamentals of vPSI problem solving and incident prevention for Southwestern Energy Company, the vPSI team visited nearby Nicholson to marvel at the spectacular Lackawanna viaduct which towers over the township. Its 128,000 m³ of concrete made it the largest concrete structure in the world when it was completed in 1915.

Readers in the oil and gas industry might appreciate a comparison with the Troll A gravity base platform built 80 years later which required 245,000 m³ of concrete.

The bridge has been recognized as a Historic Civil Engineering Landmark and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The newspaper clipping below, dated December 1919, is displayed adjacent to the plaque erected by the National Railway Historical Society.



Newspaper Article Text: *Should Live in Dugouts*



Several times since the Lackawanna viaduct, which spans the Tunkhannock creek and valley in this borough, was completed, during the prevalence of high wind freight cars have been unroofed while passing over the structure, greatly endangering life and property in that vicinity. A year or two ago portions of a car were blown from the bridge as far west as the John Maxey house.

Last Friday, at the noon hour, a freight car roof was hurled by the wind from the bridge and crashed through the roof of the Wilson house, fifty feet or more east of the viaduct, resulting in serious damage. Fortunately, the house, belonging to Mr and Mrs Stephen E Worth, was unoccupied, or probably there would have been loss of life.

Unless some way can be found to prevent a recurrence of these periodical free distributions of freight cars, residents in that locality will be unable to secure life insurance and property owners will sustain heavy losses in valuation. — Nicholson Record.

It appears that the locals could have used some vPSI help in the early days of the viaduct, as they sought to prevent the frequent recurrence of unplanned events involving flying debris from overhead as trains traversed the bridge in windy conditions. We could find no record of corrective actions having been put in place.