

Incident Learning: Reconstruct the Conditions and Decisions

Todd Jerome Jenkins | v1.0 | Reviewed October 9, 2026 | Discussion + field checks

Why this matters

After an event, earlier clues can look obvious. Separate what people knew then from what became clear later. Build the sequence from evidence, keep unanswered questions visible and examine the conditions around decisions. A crew discussion supports this work without replacing the authorized investigation.

Objective: Use a safe example to distinguish information available at the time from later knowledge and connect a finding to protection that can be verified.

Key hazards or failure points

Hindsight presented as fact; a blame label replacing explanation; witnesses pressured into one account; missing timestamps; assumptions about intent; disturbed evidence; an incident recreated for a demonstration.

Practical controls

- Follow emergency, reporting and evidence-preservation arrangements first. Use an approved learning summary or fictional exercise for the briefing. Keep personal and client details in the proper restricted process.
- Organize what happened in time order. Separate observations, documented information and interpretations. Ask what information and constraints existed at each decision point; do not invent a person's intentions or erase conflicting accounts.
- Refer unanswered questions to the authorized investigation team. Examine equipment, instructions, resources and safeguards as well as actions. Have corrective measures reviewed and verified before relying on them for similar work.

Verify It in the Field

Use a fictional paper timeline. Mark what was known at a selected point and what was learned afterward. Identify the evidence source for each statement and leave unsupported explanations as questions, not findings.

For an approved finding, check that the supporting record concerns the correct time, location and equipment. The authorized team resolves conflicting accounts through its process. Record the evidence reviewed and limitation; do not interview or reenact beyond your assigned role.

Trace one accepted finding to the control it is meant to strengthen. Have the designated checker apply the actual safe verification method and governing criterion. Record the result, checker, time and unresolved restriction before treating the action as effective.

Stop and reassess

Pause the exercise if it becomes an accusation, pressures disclosure or asks someone to recreate exposure. Protect people when a current hazard emerges. Keep disputed conclusions and unverified corrective actions open; completing the discussion does not authorize restart or close an investigation.

Ask the crew

1. What information was actually available at this point?
2. What condition needs evidence rather than an assumption?
3. Which protective change will we verify before similar work?

Use the task plan and required specialist decisions before exposure.

Sources: DOE-HDBK-1028-2009 Vol. 2, pp. 85–89; OSHA Incident Investigation and Hazard Prevention.

Free next step: [JHA/JSA planning & field-verification worksheet](#)

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/incident-learning-conditions-decisions

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