

Increasing safety through investigation

Safe living, safe working, safety. Although we are used to feeling safe, safety cannot be guaranteed. In spite of all the expertise and technology available at our fingertips, serious situations do occur. Sometimes with disastrous results. Since 2005 and appointed by virtue of national law, the Dutch Safety Board has been tasked with the investigation of accidents and incidents. Lessons learned from studying these events can lead to an improved design of processes and organisations.

In the Netherlands, the Dutch Safety Board investigates specific occurrences, broader safety issues and unsafe situations that arise gradually. Administrative processes and how they influence safety are frequently featured in Board investigations. The aim of all investigations is to learn from occurrences and to draw lessons learned to enhance safety in the future. When safety is lacking in structural ways, the Board can formulate recommendations for improvements.

Independent investigation in all areas

The Dutch Safety Board is authorised to conduct an investigation in virtually all areas. In some cases the Dutch Safety Board is legally obligated to conduct an investigation. This applies to specific occurrences in aviation, shipping, on railways and in the petrochemical industry.

Aside from the mandatory investigations, the Board decides which subjects and occurrences will be investigated. The Dutch Safety Board mainly focuses on situations where citizens depend on other parties for their safety, such as the government, businesses or institutions. For example in recent years, investigations have been conducted into safety risks on new year's eve, an investigation was conducted into the collapsed parking garage that was under construction at Eindhoven Airport and a general review of forensic care and safety was performed.

The research process is shown schematically on the back of this folder.

Far-reaching legal powers

Investigators of the Dutch Safety Board have been granted far-reaching legal powers. In the course of their investigation they may obtain relevant information by acquiring access to buildings, collecting material and obtaining anything else they need for further technical research or investigation. Examples include documents, images and sound clips or even wreckage. As stipulated in Dutch law, everyone is required to cooperate with the investigators in the performance of their duties.

Protection of witnesses and persons involved

The Dutch Safety Board collects as much information as possible from various sources to get a proper idea of the circumstances of occurrences. This means that persons involved and witnesses can also be interviewed. Their statements will only be used in the Board's own research. Any information taken from statements that is included in the investigation report, is anonymised. Statements will not be published or shared with third parties, including the Public Prosecution Service and the police.

The Dutch Safety Board Act expressly stipulates that statements, information collected by the Dutch Safety Board and documents drafted by the Dutch Safety Board may not be used as evidence in criminal proceedings, disciplinary proceedings or civil proceedings. The decision to impose a disciplinary measure, administrative penalty or administrative measure cannot be based on this either.

The Board and the office

The Dutch Safety Board consists of three permanent members, chaired by Jeroen Dijsselbloem. The board members have extensive knowledge of safety issues and possess considerable administrative and societal experience. The Dutch Safety Board can also rely on the expertise of a number of extraordinary board members with knowledge and expertise of various sectors. The office of the Dutch Safety Board has approximately 70 employees, two-thirds of whom are investigators.

Phases in the research process

The Dutch Safety Board aims to publish its reports within one year from starting. During the investigation, various phases are completed, which are shown schematically below. Because different backgrounds and factors play a role in every incident, the final report contains a justification of the investigation. This explains how the investigation was conducted and which research methods were used.



Call

After an occurrence that has interested the Board or an occurrence that falls within the scope of the Board's obligation to investigate, investigators may proceed with an exploratory investigation on site immediately. In the event that emergency services are still busy, their work will naturally take precedence.



Collecting information

An investigation begins with the collection of all relevant information. Persons involved will be interviewed and data files and documentation will be requested. In a specific occurrence, where possible, the site of the accident will be visited and a technical investigation will be performed.



Analysis

Based on all the available information a structured analysis is made of the circumstances and underlying causes: what happened exactly, how did it happen and which factors played a part? Previous investigations from other parties will also be included in the analysis. The next step is to include everything in a draft report.



Inspection of draft report

The draft report is sent to the parties involved for inspection. These parties check the report for factual inaccuracies and respond within a period of several weeks. Comments are substantiated by the Dutch Safety Board and published at the same time as the final report.





Publication

Together with the associated documents (appendices, draft report comments to the draft report and any relevant animations) the final report will be published on the website. Many reports include recommendations from the Board.





The Dutch Safety Board believes parties involved should take the lessons learned from the investigation and apply them in practice. As such, the outcome of the investigation is generally discussed with the organisations and individuals involved. Investigators and board members will often highlight findings from investigations at meetings and conferences.



Compliance with recommendations

The board will issue recommendations for improvement for most investigations. How have the recommendations been followed up and what progress has been made? The response of the parties involved will be assessed together after which the Board publishes a response on its website.









