

SCCE Internal Investigations Workshop Orlando, FL



Evidence and the Legal Elements of an Investigation

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Elements of a Workplace Investigation

- A good-faith inquiry that reaches a rational conclusion
- Interviews of the reporter, the subject, and witnesses with relevant information
- Consideration of the relevant issues and the standards implicated
- Gathering and analysis of all relevant evidence
- Assessment of the credibility of the investigation participants and the strength of the evidence
- A rational, legally defensible conclusion of whether the conduct complained about actually occurred

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Beginning an Investigation

- The obligation to investigate promptly and fairly
- The obligation to conduct an adequate investigation
- Investigations as a defense to other claims
- The obligation for a competent investigator
- The obligation to maintain confidentiality

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Legal Standards in Investigations

- There is a qualified privilege to disclose matters relating to the investigation
- The investigation process must be consistent and programmatic
- An investigation cannot begin without a reasonable basis
- A finding must be based on a preponderance of the evidence
- An employee is not entitled to review the investigation report
- The attorney-client privilege does not generally apply

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Legal Standards in Interviews

- Employees may not refuse to cooperate and be interviewed
- Do employees have Miranda rights?
- Employees have a process-fairness right to due process
- The right to be confronted with the proof and the opportunity to respond
- The prohibition against whistleblower retaliation
- Confidentiality in the interview
- The right to counsel
- The right to discuss the interview

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Identifying Information

- The primary purpose of an investigation is gathering evidence and using it as a basis for decision-making
- For evidence to be meaningful, it must be **concrete** and **specific**
- We want to know **who** was involved in the conduct, **what** that person did, **when** and **where** they did it, and **why**
- Know the difference between fact, inference and opinion

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Evidence Collection in Investigations

- Know your applicable business-conduct standard
- You must prove each element of the allegation using proper evidence
- Proper evidence is relevant
- Proper evidence is material
- Proper evidence is competent
- Proper evidence is authentic
- Proper evidence may be direct or circumstantial
- Seek corroboration of key facts before accepting them as proven

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Hearsay Evidence

- The hearsay rule exists to protect the quality of the proof
- Hearsay is essentially a statement of fact made by someone other than the witness, which is then repeated by the witness in court, in order to prove the truth of those facts
- There are multiple exceptions because certain hearsay statements are unlikely to be false
 - Statements against interest
 - Business records exception
- We can use hearsay

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Legal Claims When Things Go Wrong

- Defamation of an employee
- Retaliation for cooperating with an investigation
- False imprisonment in interviews
- Intentional infliction of emotional distress
- Assault and battery
- Invasion of privacy
- Malicious prosecution

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Closing Thoughts

- Evidence rules give you a logical framework for evaluating the reliability of evidence.
- Legal standards help set your burdens of proof and persuasion.
- Mistakes in investigations, especially the unintentional ones, can create liability in a number of ways.

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