Writing a useful hospitality incident or near-miss record

A useful incident record gives the next person a clear account of what was observed, when it happened and what action followed.

Practical staff guidance; adapt the suggested workflow to your venue and current procedures.

Deal with immediate needs first

Follow the venue's emergency and safety procedures before completing paperwork. Once it is appropriate to record the event, note the time, location and people involved using the business's approved record. Keep observations separate from information supplied by someone else. Where a time is approximate, label it as an estimate.

Describe what could be checked

Use clear sequences and observable details. "At approximately 14:10 I saw liquid across the doorway" gives a reviewer something specific to investigate. "Someone was careless" leaves both the action and evidence unclear. If you quote a person, identify that the words came from them. Preserve relevant records through the authorised process.

Record action and ownership

Include who was informed, what immediate action was taken and any work remaining. Give outstanding actions an owner and a review point. The internal log helps the business learn from events. The responsible person separately considers any statutory reporting duties, using current HSE guidance where RIDDOR applies.

Close the learning loop

A manager should review recurring locations, tasks and conditions. Feed practical findings into briefings or changes to equipment and layout. Restrict access to personal information and keep it according to the organisation's retention arrangements. A short factual record with a clear follow-up is easier to use than a long account filled with assumptions.

Workplace incident report example: a spill at the rear doorway

Fictional example: "14:10, rear doorway: I saw liquid on the floor. I kept people away and contacted the supervisor. The supervisor arranged the response under our spill procedure. At 14:20 the area was checked before normal access resumed."

Your next steps

- State time and location.
- Record observations and attributed statements.
- List immediate actions.
- Identify who received the report.
- Assign follow-up and record closure.

Separate observation from explanation

Write what happened in sequence, with the time, location, people involved and immediate response. Use exact words for relevant statements when you can record them accurately. Label information supplied by someone else and avoid guessing causes or motives. Describe an equipment or route issue precisely enough for another person to locate it. Preserve relevant records using the business procedure and restrict personal information to those who need it.

Make the follow-up useful

Fictional entry: a tray was nearly dropped when a trolley obstructed the kitchen doorway at 12:45; nobody was injured; the route was cleared by the shift lead; the delivery timing was referred to the manager for review. The action should have an owner and a follow-up date. A later investigation can add findings without rewriting the initial observation as if the cause was known at the time.

Is every internal incident record a RIDDOR report?

No. Internal reporting can capture a wider range of concerns. The responsible management process determines whether statutory reporting applies, using the relevant criteria and deadlines.

Near-miss report: a falling tray and two different accounts

A tray falls from a shelf just after a worker steps away. One witness says the shelf moved; another says the tray was overhanging. What belongs in the first report?

Compare your decision

Make the immediate area safe under the local procedure. Record time, location, conditions, objects involved and what each witness actually observed. Attribute accounts separately and keep conclusions open for the person investigating.

Compare “the shelf was defective” with “Pat saw the shelf move as the tray fell”. The second wording preserves a lead that can be checked.

Sources and editorial basis

- HSE — Reportable incidents

Guidance checked on 19 October 2026. Examples and worksheets are original suggested workflows; adapt them to your operation.

Use this on shift

Resource page and fillable working record · Read the online guide · Course details