

QE

TO: Distribution

FROM: Q/Associate Administrator for Safety and Mission Assurance  
AE/Chief Engineer

SUBJECT: Root Cause Analysis (RCA)

This memo provides the results of a joint engineering and safety effort to establish common terminology in NASA to facilitate improved communication and understanding of RCA. *RCA is a structured evaluation method that identifies the root causes of an undesired outcome and the actions adequate to prevent recurrence.*

The Agency has adopted this definition for RCA and other revised definitions for root cause and related terms to ensure that when teams say that they have reached a “root cause,” they have completed detailed evaluations, identified all relevant organizational factors, and/or exhausted all data. These definitions are applicable to both engineering and safety teams that are using RCA to evaluate problems or mishaps.

Enclosure 1 provides a summary of the new definitions. Enclosure 2 lists sources of additional information that provide an overview of RCA.

Please distribute these definitions and the overview to your engineering and safety communities and encourage the immediate adoption of these terms. We will work to include them in appropriate NASA Policy Directives (NPD’s) and Procedures and Guidelines (NPG’s) as soon as possible. Together we can strengthen “One NASA” through this adoption of a common language.

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2 Enclosures

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