

Strategies for Effective Accident Investigation



We all work hard to provide a safe workplace for our employees. No matter how safe your environment is, however, there are always some risks of injury to employees and visitors. Once an accident or incident occurs, the goal of your investigation is to find the fundamental or root cause(s) of the incident and make the appropriate changes so that the incident doesn't occur again. Below are some tips to help you focus on the issues necessary to achieve that goal:

- At a minimum, an accident investigation should occur after any first aid or emergency response has been initiated. A "best in class" process includes investigations of incidents that could have caused injury, but fortunately did not.
- Take care of your employee FIRST - don't interfere with medical care to interview an employee.
- Secure the scene. While first making sure another injury doesn't occur, keep the scene as it was when the incident happened until the investigation can be completed. Yellow tape or some other method to barricade the area is helpful.
- Inspect and investigate the area immediately, but don't try to recreate the incident. Take pictures and video if applicable to the situation. You may want to have disposable cameras available for that purpose.
- Document facts not opinions; your goal is to determine what happened, without placing blame.
- Take witness statements as soon as possible. The longer you wait, the less accurate the report will be.
- Be sure to take statements individually. When witnesses talk to each other, their individual minds have a tendency to look for common ground, rather than report what they actually saw.
- Document your findings in an Incident Report and/or Accident Investigation Report. Be specific and detailed.
- Assess the full scope of the injury, based on the information you have. What body parts were affected? How severe does the injury appear to be?
- Ask questions until you've uncovered each level of causation. This may include company policies and procedures, personnel actions, training (or lack of training) or environmental factors.
- Was the accident caused by unsafe conditions, unsafe acts, or both?
- There are often multiple causes for an accident. What directly caused the injury? What, in combination with the direct cause(s), contributed to the injury? What was the ultimate factor that contributed to the injury?
- Implement corrective actions as soon as practical.
- Share what you learned with other departments or locations.
- Hold somebody responsible for ensuring the implementation of corrective action.
- Follow up!



SafetyConnection: Strategies for Effective Accident Investigation

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