

ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

Accidents are unplanned and unexpected events that cause injury, property damage, and/or financial loss in the workplace. Incidents or “near misses” don’t result in loss, but have the potential to do so.

Ideally, safety programs focus on preventing accidents and incidents, but if one occurs, have an accident investigation procedure ready and train your employees how to use it. Investigate ALL accidents and injuries; the severity determines the extent of the investigation. Handled properly, accident investigation helps you look at problems, solve them, improve your safety programs, and prevent future accidents.

Accident investigation should prevent recurrence. Adhering strictly to fact finding in a neutral, non-confrontational manner identifies the true attitudes, behaviors, and other factors that led to the problem. Analyzing facts and asking a neutral “why” question helps find the root cause of the accident. For example, if employee error caused the accident, dig further to determine why the employee made the error.

Accident investigation should not be used to blame, punish or exonerate workers and managers; true facts will not emerge in this environment. If you investigate an accident just to complete paperwork and satisfy insurance requirements, you will erode confidence in the system and you won’t achieve your goal of prevention and loss reduction.

A supervisor in the affected area is the best person to conduct an investigation because they are most familiar with the tools, equipment, and people involved. Experts in equipment, outside agencies, and other technical resources may also be needed.

Start your investigation by securing the scene, placing equipment out of service if necessary, and taking photos. Interview victims and witnesses. Collect evidence and records and document your observations. Find the contributing factors to determine the accident’s root cause. Document the recommended corrective actions, the people assigned to complete them, and a due date for completion.

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