



ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

We believe all injuries and/or accidents are preventable. A variety of definitions exist to describe “an accident”. Basically, accidents are “unplanned events that interrupt the completion of an activity and that may (or may not) include injury or property damage”. Accidents have also been described as a harmful encounter with the environment, a danger not averted. An accident is subject to prediction and control.

Accidents are the result of hazardous acts or conditions -- most often, a combination of both. An investigation identifies which acts and conditions led to the accident allowing supervisors to take action to eliminate or control them.

Reporting All Injuries Is Important

Every injury is important enough to make note of. First-aid type can often be an indicator of the potential for more serious problems at worksite. It is essential that employees report all injuries. The problems that arise when employees fail to report injuries include:

1. Missed opportunity to learn anything from those injuries.
2. Those factors that are causing the injuries go undetected.
3. Serious infections or complications can result.
4. Other employees tend to fall into the same pattern of unsafe behavior.

The ideal time to let the employees know that all injuries must be reported is when they are hired. Be sure that supervisors have a positive attitude and do not have the impression that they may be angry when an employee does report an injury.

The Purpose of Accident Investigation

It is incorrect to think of accident investigation as merely getting out a form and filling it out, the purpose is to prevent recurrences. Recording and reporting injuries must not be a mechanical routine.

This report must show:

1. The *supervisor's version* of what happened.
2. How the injury occurred.
3. Why it happened.
4. Most importantly - what must be done to prevent recurrence?

You must systematically obtain all of the relevant facts when an injury takes place. Many benefits are obtained through proper investigation. The primary benefit is PREVENTION. Keep in mind that one of the most beneficial tools in preventing accidents at your worksite is ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION.

Another important point to remember is that accident investigation must not be viewed as a fault finding mission. The quickest way to keep an employee from relating all the facts of an accident is to lay blame on

the employee. DO NOT FIND FAULT IN HOW THE INJURY OCCURRED, but demonstrate to the injured employee that you are only looking for facts so that a similar injury does not occur.

Why Accidents Must Be Investigated

The supervisor has a special responsibility when it comes to investigating an accident.

1. They have personal interest in identifying and eliminating accident causes. The people being injured are your employees. It is your production that will suffer. It is your reputation at stake.
2. They are the most likely people to take action in correcting an unsafe act and/or unsafe condition. Supervisors have direct control over their staff and have the ability to follow up on incidents and accidents.
3. The supervisor knows most about the circumstances. They have daily contact with the employees working at their worksites or in their departments. They know the area, machines, work processes, and individual characteristics of their employees.
4. They are first in line to effectively communicate with their employees. They, for the most part, “speak the same language” as their employees.

Benefits of Accident Investigation to Supervisors

Supervisors also benefit from prompt and thorough accident investigation. Some of these benefits include:

1. Concern for employees is demonstrated by effectively interviewing them. Once again, remember to find fact - not fault.
2. The supervisor builds credibility by correcting those items that caused the injuries.
3. Time is saved by effectively conducting the investigation, finding the cause, and preventing future accidents.

The What, When and Why of Accident Investigations

The inexperienced supervisor may ask, “What an accident investigation is?” Actually, the accident investigation is the supervisor’s analysis and description of what took place. Every accident must be thoroughly analyzed.

It must never be a repetitious account of what the injured employee said. All of the facts gathered from the injured employee, witnesses and your own analysis will make up the report.

The time to conduct an accident investigation is as soon after the accident as possible - if possible, immediately after the accident is reported. The information gathered is fresh and does not as readily become confusing, forgotten or distorted.

Accident investigations have but one purpose - to prevent accidents. The supervisor’s purpose in accident investigation is not to pin blame on an employee. **Preventing recurrence is the key.**

Conducting the Accident Investigation

The best starting point is the interview of the employee involved in the accident. Apply these techniques during your investigation:

1. Put the employee at ease. Remind him/her of the purpose of the interview. You want to prevent recurrence. You do not want to fix blame. The interview is a joint effort to prevent other injuries. Be

friendly, understanding, sympathetic and be calm. Do not immediately question the employee if he is emotionally upset or in pain.

2. Conduct the investigation as close to the accident scene as possible. You want to make the interview as private as possible. Privacy provides several advantages:
 - a. It puts the employee at ease.
 - b. It prevents ideas from being influenced by others.
3. Ask for the employee's version of the accident/incident. Let them tell their own version. Do not interrupt to ask a variety of questions. Do not make judgments.
4. Ask specific question:
 - What happened?
 - What was done?
 - How was it done?

Make sure to write down what the employee says.

Ask open-ended questions so that responses cannot be answered with a yes or no. Never use the word careless.

5. Repeat the person's story (as you have written it) back to them. It will be more understandable and the person can correct any errors, deficiencies or misunderstandings in their story.
6. What could have been done to prevent accident reoccurrence?
7. The last phase of the interview must close on a positive note. Tell the employee what you are going to do to keep the same type of accident/incident from happening again.

Use these same principles when talking to witnesses. A witness does have to be an eyewitness to be effective.

Managing the Accident Scene

An accident scene is a chaotic place, particularly when injuries are involved. The supervisor responsible for the area should take charge of the site and direct any response activities.

It is important to remember that two concerns take priority at any accident scene:

- Care and treatment of the injured.
- Elimination or control of **remaining** hazards.

Treat the Injured First:

In most instances, the care and treatment of the injured will take first priority at the scene. However, when hazardous conditions at the scene present an immediate threat to the health or safety of anyone, including rescue workers, eliminating or controlling the hazard should take priority.

When injuries are encountered at an accident scene, the supervisor should make sure that proper emergency help has been summoned and the victims are given any necessary first aid. If emergency providers are already on the scene, the supervisor should make sure they receive whatever cooperation they need to get

the job done. Only authorized first aid personnel should be administering first aid treatment. This includes trained employees, EMTs, paramedics, medical personnel.

Control Remaining Hazards:

Sometimes, after an accident has occurred, conditions at the site can remain hazardous. If anything at the scene still presents a danger, access to the area must be restricted until the hazard has been eliminated or controlled. If there is any uncertainty about conditions at an accident site, **do not take chances**, keep people out of the area until no danger remains.

Isolate the Site to Protect People and Preserve Evidence:

It is important to keep the area from being disturbed until it has been inspected. A common way to handle this is to use a brightly colored marking tape, rope, cones, barricades, or other types of signs to outline the restricted area. If none of these are available, employees may be posted around the site to keep people out of the area.

Make Your Accident Investigation Productive

Why the term “Productive” accident investigation?

Most people think of accidents exclusively as a loss, a liability. But such events can be turned into an asset if proper steps are taken. The benefits are:

1. Improvement of methods and conditions.
2. Identification of training deficiencies.
3. Demonstration of management’s concern for employee safety.
4. Supervisors add to their knowledge of managing.