

Accident Investigations

Although some accidents may occur, even with the most comprehensive safety and health program in place, the same accident need not occur twice. Accidents do not simply happen; they are caused. Usually accidents result from multiple causes which can be determined by effective accident investigation. Accidents are often caused by a combination of **unsafe acts** and **unsafe conditions**. If employees report all accidents and management investigates and follows up with corrective action, recurrences can be prevented. Accident investigations reflect management's concern and promote a company's safety program.

The investigation needs to focus on fact finding, and not on fixing blame. If care is not taken to ensure this, more harm than good may result. This means that the investigation should be concerned with only the facts, although individuals should still be held accountable for their actions.

WHO SHOULD CONDUCT THE INVESTIGATION?

This should be determined before an accident occurs. The supervisor should make an immediate report after completing the initial investigation. This is done because the supervisor will be most familiar with the operation and will most likely be responsible to put into effect and oversee the resulting recommendations.

COMPLETING THE INVESTIGATION:

The investigation should be made as soon after the accident as possible.

This will help ensure the facts gathered are fresh in everyone's mind and will ease other employees' concerns about a recurrence.

Document the investigation.

The use of a form or guide will go a long way to assure that all necessary information is covered.

Interview witnesses individually.

Every employee who was involved in the accident, or witnessed the accident, should be questioned.

If contradictory information is received, supervisors should interview those involved a second time.

Interview the injured worker promptly while the information is clear.

No possible causes for the accident should be eliminated until all the details are gathered.

Conclusions should not be drawn until a thorough investigation is completed and all the underlying causes are uncovered.

Control and preserve the scene.

Since conditions and evidence can change rapidly, it may be useful to photograph or videotape the area and equipment in use at the time of the accident.

Other steps which may assist to preserve evidence are to keep samples of damaged materials and machine items which may have failed, if practical. It may also be necessary to section off the accident scene to ensure the evidence is not altered before the investigation can be completed.

Joint investigations with Zenith or other outside agencies may be needed when causes are hard to identify or isolate.

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Compile the information in an organized manner utilizing an accident investigation form.

All possible questions regarding the accident should be answered and the corrective action needed to prevent a recurrence should be described.

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Management Incident Investigation Report

The purpose of this report is to help prevent similar incidents from recurring. Make this report as accurate and thorough as possible. Remember, always follow-up with the appropriate corrective action(s).

Incident: Near Miss Minor Injury Minor Illness Major Injury Major Illness

Incident Date: _____ Time: _____ AM/PM

Injured Employee: _____ Age: _____

Occupation: _____ Months on this Job: _____

Where did the incident occur? _____

Witness(es): _____

How did the incident occur? (What was the employee doing when injured?) _____

Describe the injury(s) or damage. _____

What unsafe act(s) contributed to the incident? _____

What unsafe condition(s) contributed to the incident? _____

What do you recommend be done (or have you done) to prevent this type of incident from recurring? _____

Investigation conducted by: _____ Date: _____

Report reviewed by: _____ Date: _____

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Corrective action(s) taken and date: _____

Ask open-ended questions.

Look for unsafe acts and conditions. Some basic questions should be asked during the investigation.

When did the accident occur?

In addition to the date of the accident, the time of day, shift and day of the week should also be stated.

Also, information as to whether the accident occurred during the beginning, middle or end of the shift may be helpful.

Where did the accident occur?

The actual accident site should be described in detail.

Determine if the persons involved were where they were supposed to be, and whether the equipment was in the proper location.

Who was involved?

Generally, more than the injured person is affected by an accident, and often additional individuals contribute to the accident causes.

What happened?

Types of questions to ask include:

- What was the action or procedure being done?
- What was the injury?
- Was the employee properly trained?
- Was there anything unusual about the procedure or personnel?
- What tools or equipment were involved?

How did the accident occur?

By answering this question, all the facts of the accident are brought together.

Why did the accident occur?

It is important to determine why the accident occurred in order to identify the corrective actions which should be taken.

What do you recommend be done (or have you done) to prevent this incident from recurring?

This is the single most important question of any accident investigation.

ONCE THE ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION IS COMPLETED:

Completing the report

Remember, its accuracy and timeliness will also be crucial to any possible litigation.

Take or recommend corrective action.

Recommendations should be directed at correcting all the contributing factors.

Document corrective action.

The finding should be reviewed by your Safety Committee and the individual charged with overall facility safety.

As with all recommendations, formal follow-up procedures should be established to assure timely implementation and completion of corrective actions.

Report Distribution.

The people having the greatest control over the work situation relating to the accident should be the first people to receive the report. These may include the immediate supervisor, department manager, safety director, safety committee and the president.

The person or office responsible for handling personnel matters should also receive a copy immediately in order to help expedite any processing of workers' compensation insurance payments, etc.

Remember, prevention of future accidents is the key and main focus of any investigation. If you have any questions, or need professional assistance with accident investigations, call you Zenith Safety and Health Consultant.