

Employee Incident Investigations

Every 7 seconds, a worker is injured on the job (NSC, 2019). This number is staggering, especially since workplace injuries are preventable. It is important that organizations take steps to identify and mitigate the causes and contributing factors to employee accidents and injuries.

An Incident Investigation Program is a systematic review process that allows an organization to learn from experience and aims to prevent accidents and injuries in the workplace by finding the root cause. This bulletin discusses the importance of incident investigation and provides general steps to help organizations develop an Incident Investigation Program.

In addition to preventing future accidents, a comprehensive root cause analysis:

- Serves to develop incident trend information
- Focuses management and supervisors' attention on safety and helps them consider how to prevent future accidents
- Helps monitor the effectiveness of the organizational safety program
- Provides information for workers' compensation claims handling

It is important to complete an investigation every time an employee incident occurs, regardless of its severity. Even the best safety program may not guarantee a workplace will be 100% accident free. When accidents do occur, it is essential that there is implementation of a root cause analysis. It is not meant to be an exercise in placing blame, or finding someone at fault. It is meant to be a fact-finding mission.

The purpose of the accident investigation is to determine the direct cause of the incident and to prevent similar occurrences by documenting facts and reinforcing a joint management-employee commitment to safety in the workplace. Identifying the causal or contributing factors in a workplace accident provides the opportunity for these facts to be evaluated so that corrective actions, including re-training, may be taken.

General steps to follow in an Accident Investigation:

- Survey the scene
- Gather the evidence - photos, interviews
- Analyze the information
- Recommend changes

Employee and Witness Interviews

Interviews can be a useful tool in the investigation process. Some sample questions to consider:

1. Who was involved in the accident?
2. Were there any witnesses? Obtain contact information.
3. Where and when did the accident occur (specific location and time)?
4. What injuries were sustained?
5. What was the employee doing at the time of the accident?
6. Was the employee familiar with the job and procedures?
7. Were approved procedures being followed?
8. Was proper protective or safety equipment being used?
9. Had the employee received safety training pertaining to the activity they were performing?
10. What was the physical condition of the area when the accident occurred?

The final question to consider is, “Could anything have been done differently to avoid the incident?” Too often employees will answer this question in the negative, even though it was clear that approved procedures and/or safety rules were not being followed. A safe workplace does not happen by accident. Each incident should be investigated thoroughly to avoid repetitive occurrences and employee injuries.

Conclusion

Once an organization is aware of the causes and factors that may contribute to workplace accidents and injuries, such as hazards in the work area or inadequate safety training, it is crucial that they take steps to correct the problems. By analyzing the information discovered during the incident investigation, organizations can implement the necessary changes to prevent future incidents in the workplace.

Resources

National Safety Council. (2019). Workplace Injuries. Retrieved from <https://www.nsc.org/work-safety/tools-resources/infographics/workplace-injuries>

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). (2016). Root Cause: The Importance of Root Cause Analysis during Incident Investigation. [PDF]. Retrieved from <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3895.pdf>

OSHA. (2015). Incident [Accident] Investigations: A Guide for Employers. [PDF]. Retrieved from https://www.osha.gov/dte/InclnvGuide4Empl_Dec2015.pdf

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