

To The Point Accident Investigation

CHUBB®



Preventing Future Accidents

Although workplaces today are safer than in the past, accidents continue to happen. Every year, millions of workers experience disabling on-the-job injuries and thousands more are killed.

An accident is an unplanned incident that results in injury, illness or property damage. Investigating accidents is an important element of a successful workplace safety program. Accident investigation is a process that seeks to determine the factors that contributed to and caused an incident, and applies this information to prevent similar incidents from occurring. A thorough investigation can help identify both obvious and underlying problems in procedures, operations, equipment, tools, job functions and work practices.

A written accident investigation program defines responsibilities for managers, supervisors, team leaders and safety committee members. Individuals who have been assigned accident investigation responsibilities should receive training to

understand the importance of accident investigation and how to complete the steps of the investigation process.

An investigation should be conducted whenever these situations occur:

- Injury, illness or property damage—including cumulative trauma disorders and other ergonomic-related injuries that may not result from a single incident
- Near misses—in which injury, illness or property damage could have occurred as the result of unsafe behaviors or conditions

Conducting an Investigation

1. **Collect Facts**—After any injuries are cared for and any physical hazards are controlled, secure the accident scene to preserve it undisturbed. This helps ensure that situational facts can be recorded accurately. Any items that need to be removed or changed should be photographed and kept for later reference.

Risk Engineering Services

Upon responding to an accident, the investigator should write down initial observations, as well as those of any witnesses. Be sure to look beyond the obvious. Most accidents have a number of contributing factors, and the investigator must seek to uncover all of them. Approaching each accident with an open mind to uncover what happened –and why– is crucial.

It is important to remember that the accident investigation process is based on finding fact, not fault. Focus on the processes rather than the individual to identify the true cause of the accident. These tasks are necessary to document the facts of any accident:

- Sketch or photograph the physical scene
- Collect evidence, use photographs to show the context
- Interview witnesses
- Review previous accident records

2. Analyze Information–The investigator analyzes the entire chain of events culminating in the accident to identify the root cause. An accident often results from many factors working together. The investigator must consider all of the facts and their interrelationships to identify the symptoms and causes of the accident.

A symptom is an unsafe act or condition that often contributes to an accident, but is not the cause of the accident. Symptoms are easy to identify and often mistaken for causing the accident. Examples of symptoms include:

- Careless forklift operation
- Oil on the floor
- Improper lifting techniques
- Not wearing eye protection

The cause is the underlining reason for the accident. Causes can involve material, environment, personnel, management or tasks. Examples of accident causes include:

- Inadequate employee training
- Lack of accountability
- Inadequate policies and procedures
- Poor maintenance of equipment

3. Take Corrective Measures–Preventing future accidents is an essential part of the program. The only way to reduce the likelihood that a similar incident occurs in the future is to implement corrective measures that address the symptoms and causes identified in the analysis.

4. Document Findings and Actions–A written accident report documents all the information gathered during the investigation including the initial facts, witness statements, chain of events, contributing factors and uncontrolled hazards. It also records the analysis, conclusions and corrective actions. Maintaining records of all accidents allows for identification of trends and useful statistics. Be sure to complete the applicable forms.

5. Follow Up–The investigator or management should ensure that the recommended corrective measures have been properly implemented and are accomplishing the goal of eliminating or reducing accidents. Effective accident investigations are an important part of a successful safety program and can help your business reduce costs; prevent injury, illness and property damage; and enhance profitability.

Resources

OSHA Incident Investigation Guide
www.osha.gov/dcsp/products/topics/incidentinvestigation/index.html

OSHA Accident Investigation Summaries
www.osha.gov/pls/imis/accidentsearch.html

Instructions for OSHA Accident Investigation Search
www.osha.gov/tutorials/acci_help.html

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety - Accident Investigation
www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/investig.html

Health and Safety Executive - Accident / Incident Investigation
www.hse.gov.uk/managing/delivering/check/investigating-accidents-incidents.htm

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