

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH & SAFETY ISSUES

ACCIDENT INVESTIGATIONS

What type of accidents should be investigated?

Every accident or near miss which involved or would have involved the worker going to a doctor or hospital should be investigated.

Why should accidents be investigated?

To prevent similar occurrences from happening in the future.

Who should investigate

A union and a management member of the health and safety committee or an employee (chosen by the union) and a member of management familiar with the work area in which the accident occurred.

Who should be notified?

Check the regulations applicable to your workplace to see if the government regulatory agency should be notified of accidents and under which circumstances.

What should accident investigation reports contain?

1. The place, date and time of the accident;
2. The name(s) and job title(s) of those injured, if applicable;
3. The names of the witnesses;
4. A brief description of the accident;
5. A statement of the sequence of events preceding the accident;
6. The identification of any unsafe conditions, acts or procedures, which contributed in any manner to the accident;
7. Recommended corrective actions to prevent similar occurrences.
8. The names of the persons who investigated the accident.

What should accident investigations reports NOT contain?

Blame. This is especially the case where management attempts to establish that the injured worker was the sole or major cause of his/her misfortune and ignores other reasons for the accident.

Look beyond the obvious

Suppose a worker is cut from a saw. Should the cause of the accident be given as “improper placement of hands” as is the case in some accident investigations reports?

What other factors may be relevant?

- should there be a guard designed for the saw?
- should the work process be re-designed?
- should the saw be moved so the worker could stand in a different position?
- is there a source of an air contaminant such as carbon monoxide or solvent fumes nearby which may dull the worker’s attention (even though the contaminant may be within “legal” limits)?
- is the worker tired because of overtime or shift work?
- is the work area too congested?
- is the work area excessively noisy, dulling the worker’s senses?
- have other workers been injured on the same or similar machines?
- has there been any production speed-up forcing workers to “cut corners”, neglecting safe work procedures?
- is the worker suffering any harassment from supervisors on the job?
- does a job safety analysis exist for the job?
- has the worker been trained properly for the job?

The above are examples of questions that need to be asked for one particular type of accident. Make sure that your accident investigations look beyond the obvious to the root causes of the accident.

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