

Accident Investigation Procedures

Accident investigation is a key aspect of any employee safety program. Investigating employee injuries provides management with essential information regarding unsafe acts and conditions present in their workplace. Addressing these unsafe acts and conditions with corrective actions will result in a safer work environment. It is very difficult for management to have a true understanding of workplace hazards without a formal accident investigation procedure.

An effective accident investigation program must focus on fact finding as opposed to fault finding. A program that places blame for accidents will fail. Injured employees will not cooperate in the investigation process for fear of reprisal, witnesses will not readily step forward with information, and management will create distrust with their workforce. A program based on fact finding can result in identifying root and contributing accident causes by utilizing cooperation from all affected parties. The accident cause can then be corrected, which will result in a safer workplace.

Accident cause is frequently rooted in a lack of effective procedures and control of hazards. Investigations need to go beyond the apparent unsafe act or condition to identify why these issues took place. For this reason, accident investigation has to be a management-driven procedure. The most effective accident investigations involve the front line supervisor, as he or she knows the job, workers and shortcuts in procedures the best. The front line supervisor may have performed the job before becoming a member of the management team. They know which employees are prone to taking shortcuts, and may be able to identify those short cuts. The front line supervisor should lead the investigation while keeping an open mind, avoiding pre-conceived notions of accident cause. A trained supervisor will know how to use their knowledge of the job to find the real cause of an accident.

Accident Investigation Training

Accident investigation training is essential to finding all the real causes of an accident. There may have been several factors that came together at the same time resulting in property damage, an injury or even a fatality. Near miss accidents also need attention. Supervisors and next level management should be trained on how to conduct an accident investigation.

Training should include:

- Why accidents are investigated, including near misses
- Procedures to follow when conducting the investigation
- The importance of prompt response to the accident: the who, when, and where of the investigation
- Evidence preservation, collection and examination
- Injured employee and witness interviewing techniques and evaluations
- Analysis and determination of cause, and corrective action
- Preparation of reports
- Follow-up on corrective action implementation

All accidents should be reported, regardless of size. However, not all accidents require full investigation. Accidents involving employee injury or lost work time require full investigation. Property-damage-only accidents need to be checked to determine if injury could have resulted. If so, investigate for cause and determine corrective action.

Information gathered in an investigation should be recorded on a printed, internal form.

An accident investigation form should capture:

- **Identification:** Include information on who was injured, their department, the date and time, and where the accident occurred.



- **Accident description:** Briefly describe what happened in as much detail as possible. Include information gathered from witnesses before, during, and after the accident. Utilize information gathered from your visit to the accident scene.
- **Accident analysis:** Consider the unsafe acts and conditions revealed from your investigation. How did these issues contribute to the accident, if at all?
- **Potential severity and frequency:** Consider the propensity of a similar accident occurring again and the degree of severity. High frequency and high severity accident potential requires the utmost attention.
- **Corrective action:** Determine the actions to correct the hazards that caused or significantly contributed to the accident. Sometimes temporary steps need to be done right away to protect against repeat accidents until more permanent solutions can be implemented.

Accident Investigation Process

Accidents should be investigated right away. Accidents occur when the safety procedures breakdown, showing a flaw in the employee safety program. When an accident occurs accident investigation should be considered the most important task the supervisor has to perform that day. This demonstrates to all the employees that management is committed to the employee safety program.

Accident investigation should be conducted at the accident scene. The supervisor should protect the scene with caution tape to prevent inadvertent tampering of potential evidence. Pictures from different angles should be taken before clean up to preserve the scene. Pictures help investigators recall actual conditions.

Gather information from witnesses while information is still fresh in their minds. It is best to interview witnesses separately so no one person influences other witnesses. Seek information on what the witness saw or heard before, during and after the accident occurred. Interview the injured employee after medical treatment has been administered. Tie all information together as you formulate your investigation.

Complete the written accident report stating the discovered unsafe acts, conditions and needed corrective actions. Send the report to the appropriate company management contacts for review of completeness. The report may go to the safety director, plant manager or others. They may ask for a more detailed investigation, and it's important to cooperate in this review.

The responsibility for implementing corrective action should be assigned to one person in the company. That person could be the safety director, plant manager or supervisor. Work with them to implement corrective actions to prevent recurrence. Follow up with corrective actions until implementation is complete and then report the results to top management. Top management should communicate corrective actions to other departments where similar exposures may exist.

An Accident Report Form is provided with this bulletin for your use. It is an internal form to be completed by the supervisor to record the findings of their investigation. Note that this form does not replace the First Report of Injury form used to submit Worker Compensation claims to the State Industrial Commission or your insurance carrier.

IMPORTANT NOTICE - The information and suggestions presented by Western National Insurance Company in this Technical Bulletin are for your consideration in your loss prevention efforts. They are not intended to be complete or definitive in identifying all hazards associated with your business, preventing workplace accidents, or complying with any safety related, or other, laws or regulations. You are encouraged to alter them to fit the specific hazards of your business and to have your legal counsel review all of your plans and company policies.