

Monthly Safety Shorts

Accident Investigations

Accidents are unplanned and undesirable, yet they also offer the chance to learn a great deal about good safety and health. Accident investigation is the first step toward avoiding future injuries and financial losses. When dangerous conditions and careless attitudes are changed as a result of an accident, it can lead to increased performance and productivity.

Goals of the Accident Investigation

An investigation determines what, why and how the accident happened. Its purpose is not to blame someone. A good investigation looks at how a system makes it possible for accidents to take place. Oftentimes the investigation will find out that many similar incidents have happened before.

To be useful, investigations must be honest. Sometimes it is difficult for a supervisor to perform an objective investigation in his or her own department. People from outside the department often have a helpful perspective.

Create an Investigation Plan

Each company and department should have a tested investigation plan. If there is an accident, the plan can be put into effect immediately. Often, investigators must move quickly.

A written plan may include:

- who is in charge;

- the complete “chain of command” listing of all those to be notified and when;
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) which should be at the scene;
- special transportation or communication needs;
- how to gain access to the site for as long as necessary;
- who will record interviews of supervisors, employees involved in the accident, and other witnesses;
- who will take photographs if necessary; and
- who will prepare the final report.

After the Investigation

Following the investigation, investigators will usually write an accident investigation report. The report may include a description of causes and suggested corrections. A good report is accurate, detailed and produced soon after the accident.

Honesty Helps Ensure Safety

Everyone involved, including supervisors and employees, should be helpful and honest during an investigation. When a complete understanding of the accident emerges, this can make it less likely that a similar accident will happen again.