



The Pennsylvania Counties Workers Compensation Trust
A program of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania

ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION: BEST PRACTICES

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Note: One of the sources used for information for the Best Practices handout were obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry website.

ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION PROGRAM

WHAT IS AN ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION PROGRAM?

An Accident Investigation Program is a management tool by which accidents or injuries are systematically studied so that their causes and contributing factors can be identified and eliminated. Accident investigation is a technique that allows a member to “learn from its experience.”

In addition to preventing future accidents, the Accident Investigation Program:

- Develops accident trend information.
- Focuses supervisors’ attention on safety and helps them consider methods for preventing future accidents.
- Helps monitor the effectiveness of the member safety program.
- Provides information for workers’ compensation claims handling

THE MAKE-UP Of AN ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION PROGRAM?

Everyone shares the responsibility for the success of the Accident Investigation Program. Specific groups and their respective duties are as follows:

Management/Commissioners: Is responsible for planning and developing the system, and has the authority to enforce the program. In general, management will develop investigation forms and procedures; train supervisors and members of the safety committee; review accident reports and trends and perform periodic program evaluations.

Supervisors: Should investigate accidents and identify their cause(s), and also develop suggestions and recommendations, methods and techniques for preventing accidents.

Safety Committee Members: May investigate accidents and determine their cause(s); review accident reports; and identify trends. The Safety Committee will report its findings and recommendations to management. They should be consulted at any time there is a question about the accuracy of the description of the accident, or the supervisor’s description is significantly different than the employee’s report. The committee should also meet at least once a month.

Employees: Must report accidents promptly and participate in the investigation process. Whenever possible employees should be encouraged to share insights with management about ways to prevent future accidents.

ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

Even the best safety inspection won't guarantee your workplace to be 100% accident free. So, when accidents do occur, it is essential that an accident investigation procedure be in place steps taken to prevent the same incident from reoccurring.

An accident investigation should be applied every time an accident occurs, regardless of its severity.

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 the joint employer-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 in order that corrective actions may be taken.

General steps to follow in an Accident Investigation:

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

ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION PROCEDURES

When an accident occurs, the investigator must act quickly. No two situations are alike, but normally the following is correct.

- A. Attend to the injured employee.
- B. Assess accident scene to determine if it is safe to enter.
- C. Secure the accident scene.
- D. Notify your immediate supervisor.

The amount of action will depend on the severity of the accident. Follow established company procedure. Begin your investigation as soon as possible.

Be objective -- Don't let emotions or your own opinions cloud your investigation. Proceed as follows:

- A. Interview everyone who saw or was involved in the accident, including the victim (may have to be done at a later date). Use this procedure:
 - a. Put them at ease -- explain that you are finding facts -- not fault.
 - b. Interview "on the spot" -- if possible.
 - c. Interview each person separately -- group interviews create confusion.
 - d. Encourage the person to tell "what they saw."
 - e. Ask open-ended questions: "Why? What? Where? When? Who? How?"
 - f. Repeat the story back for confirmation.
 - g. End on a positive note.
 - h. Keep the pipeline open. Some people will remember important facts later.
- B. Observe the accident scene -- Look for obvious defects in equipment, tools, and the object causing the injury. In some cases photos or drawings may help.
- C. Record critical information promptly -- don't delay. Use a prepared form to help remember key questions.
- D. Gather facts, not opinions. Use them to identify activities that contributed to the accident.
- E. Make conclusions based on facts and knowledge, not suppositions.

GENERAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO ASK

There are certain key questions that will help an investigator to complete a thorough investigation. The following will work in many instances.

1. Who was involved in the accident?
2. Were there any witnesses?
3. Where and when did the accident occur (specific location and time)?
4. What injuries were sustained?
5. What was the victim doing at the time of the accident?
6. Was the victim authorized and qualified to do this operation?
7. Were approved procedures being followed?
8. Was the victim familiar with the job and procedures?
9. Is the job or process new to the area?
10. Were proper tools or equipment being used?
11. Was the proper supervision being provided?
12. Had the victim received hazard potential training prior to the accident?
13. What was the physical condition of the area when the accident occurred?
14. Did the accident involve a motor vehicle?

Other questions may be needed, depending on the accident.

ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION TIPS

- Accident investigation should be done promptly. This will help in collecting the most accurate information before conditions change.
- Ask questions first that focus on “what” happened. By concentrating on the events that occurred which relate “details” such as time, location, and objects involved in the early questioning, there is a better chance of getting factual data.
- Concentrate fact gathering on what caused the accident to occur and not on the result (injury or illness) of the accident. The same accident could have results that may range from near miss to fatality.
- Try to talk first with witnesses on an individual basis so their opinions will not be swayed by others.
- Use open-ended questions when interviewing witnesses to avoid influencing their opinion. For example, it would be better to ask a witness to “tell me what you saw,” rather than questions such as “do you think the injured person committed an unsafe act before the accident occurred?”
- Listen! It is difficult to avoid interrupting someone when you have a question, but let people explain what they saw or know in their own words, as completely as possible, before trying to ask more questions or clarify information.
- Try to gather your information with people at the actual accident scene. This will enable a clearer picture of the events that can be obtained while trying to recall what happened from an office interview.
- Get recommendations from people who do the same job. Ask what kinds of corrective measures might prevent a similar accident.
- Look at facts obtained to determine action that will eliminate or reduce the burden of the employee trying to “remember proper actions” or “being careful.” Whenever possible, take corrective actions that design out the hazard or physically guard the employee from the hazard if it can’t be removed.
- An accident report is most useful for one thing -- to provide information that can be used to keep a similar situation from occurring. Make sure your information is objective, factual, and followed through with appropriate corrective measures.

ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION FORM

This form is an internal accident investigation document meant to facilitate, change, and improve the work environment for your employees. The investigation process is not fault finding and should not be used as an impetus for disciplinary action.

These steps will help you investigate an accident and fill out the form:

1. Discuss the accident with the employee involved and with any witnesses. Be sure to question the why ~ what ~ where ~ when ~ who ~ how aspects of the accident.
2. Inspect the equipment or materials involved for conditions that could be made safer.
3. Study the job set-up and process of doing work. Could it be improved?
4. Is the employee involved suited for the job he/she is doing? Did he/she receive adequate training? Are there any other contributing factors/problems? (i.e. use of drugs or alcohol, or emotional problems)
5. Recommendations to correct the problem must be practical. Be sure your recommendations will not create other situations, which could result in injury to employees.
6. Use the form to organize information gathered from your observations and interviews.
7. Complete your investigation report no later than the next working day after the accident.

ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION FORM

Employee Involved _____ Dept. _____

Employee # _____ Employment Status P/T F/T Temporary Shift _____

Date of Accident ___/___/___ Time _____ am or pm Location _____

Job _____ Activity at Time of Accident _____

DESCRIPTION OF ACCIDENT: What happened at the time of the accident?

Witnesses: _____

Emergency Transportation required: Y or N

WHAT WAS THE CAUSE OF THE ACCIDENT?

Determine the cause by analyzing all the contributing factors if a person, machine, or other physical condition was involved. Find out HOW and WHY.

Use the form to organize information gathered from your observations and interviews.

A. Describe any UNSAFE acts:

B. Describe any UNSAFE conditions:

C. Describe the FUNDAMENTAL ACCIDENT CAUSE:

WHAT CORRECTIVE ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN?

What have you done or what do you recommend to change or modify to prevent recurrence of a similar accident?

Has it been done? Yes No If Not, Why? (Explain)
