

Accident Investigation

A learning experience

The only benefit of an incident (or near-miss) is the opportunity to learn from the circumstances to help yourself and others from repeating the same type of loss. This can only be accomplished with a thorough and timely accident investigation. The results of which can then be utilized to prevent future like events from occurring.

Accident investigations are not intended to assign blame or fix fault, but to prevent the reoccurrence of injuries and property damage. Most accidents, unsafe acts, and conditions that lead to accidents are only symptoms of underlying causes. Identifying the basic cause (the unsafe act and/or unsafe condition) is only the starting point in learning why the incident occurred. Identifying the primary causes of an accident will assist in determining the underlying cause, which enables effective changes and corrections.

A simple 4-step approach

A simple 4-step process can be utilized for: gathering facts, analyzing facts, implementing corrective measures, and monitoring follow-up:

Step 1: Gather the Facts - Gathering facts centers on asking the age old questions of who, what, when, where, why and how.

WHO

Who was injured?

Who saw the accident?

Who was working with the injured person? Who had assigned the person to the work task?

Who had trained the person on the hazards and protective measures for this task?

Who else was involved?

WHAT

- What were the causal factors of the accident? What were the injuries?
- What was the person doing when injured?
- What had the person been instructed or trained to do? What tools or machinery was the person using?
- What specific precautions were necessary?
- What personal protective equip. (PPE) was being used? What PPE should have been used?
- What will be done to prevent a recurrence? What safety rules were in place to prevent this? What safety rules were being followed?
- What were the environmental conditions (e.g., lighting, floor surface, etc.)?

WHEN

- When did the accident occur? When did the person start this task?
- When was the person assigned to this department?
- When had the supervisor last checked on the job progress?

WHY

- Why was the person injured?
- Why did the person do what he/she did? Why wasn't protective equipment used? Why weren't specific instructions issued?
- Why didn't the person check with the supervisor when he/she noted things weren't as they should be?
- Why did the person continue to work under these circumstances?

WHERE

- Where did the accident occur?
- Where was the person at the time of the accident? Where was the supervisor at the time?
- Where were fellow workers at the time?

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Step 2: Analyze the facts - The next step is analyzing the information in order to determine the root cause of the accident. The root cause is best described as what prompted the accident to occur. Root causes can include: equipment condition/maintenance; the environment (floors, lighting, housekeeping, etc.); were procedures followed; was PPE required and/or worn correctly; was the injured employee trained properly or were other personnel working safely.

One method to help determine the root cause is to use the “Five Why’s” method:

Incident – An employee is injured tripping in the warehouse.

Why # 1: Why did they trip?

Answer: They stepped on a pallet.

Why # 2: Why was the pallet in the walkway?

Answer: It was left by another employee.

Why # 3: Why was it left there?

Answer: The other employee didn’t know where to put it.

Why # 4: Why wasn’t the employee instructed as to where empty pallets should go?

Answer: There really is not a specific area designated for empty pallets.

Why #5: Why is there nothing pre-designated to place empty pallets?

Answer: Because there is no room on the loading dock.

- **Step 3: Take Corrective Actions** - Once the root cause of the accident is determined, a corrective measure should be developed to prevent the incident from occurring in the future. Once the corrective measure has been determined it should be assigned to a responsible individual/department.
- **Step 4: Document Closure of Corrective Actions** – It is critical to confirm the corrective actions have been completed and are effective.

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