

*An accident investigation is one of the most effective tools in reducing workplace injuries and illnesses. The accident investigation process provides insight into the root causes of accidents and actions required to prevent recurrence. Even minor accidents and near misses should be investigated, because the severity of an accident is often just a matter of timing.*

### Developing an Accident Investigation Program

- Designate the accident investigation team. The immediate supervisor of the person(s) involved in the accident should always be a member of the accident investigation team; they are often familiar with the circumstances surrounding the accident and may be able to suggest corrective actions. Other members may include the safety director, human resource manager, operations manager, administrator, maintenance and technical staff, safety committee members or other employees. A benefit of a team approach is that it brings different perspectives and ideas to the process.
- Develop an accident investigation form. The form may take any format, as long as it answers two important questions: what caused the accident and what can be done to prevent it from happening again. A sample accident investigation form is available at [www.emcins.com](http://www.emcins.com).
- Create an accident investigation kit. The kit should include items such as a camera, accident investigation forms, barricade tape, flashlight, tape measure, and work gloves.

### Training the Investigation Team

Simply handing an accident investigation form to an injured employee's supervisor and requiring him/her to complete it without any training is not likely to prevent future accidents. All members of the



investigation team should be trained in the factors that cause accidents, with the goal of determining the root cause(s) of accidents and developing corrective actions to prevent similar accidents. Investigators should have the mindset that all accidents are preventable and not use the investigation to place blame on any employee, even if the employee's unsafe act may have contributed to the accident.

Accident investigation training should cover the following three types of root causes:

- Physical hazards or unsafe conditions—Discuss all physical and environmental factors that may contribute to accidents, such as water on the floor from a leaky roof, defective ladders or unguarded equipment.
- Human behaviors or unsafe acts—Discuss the human behaviors or unsafe acts that may contribute to accidents, such as removing safety guards on equipment, not wearing the required personal protective equipment, violating a safety rule or horseplay.

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- Management system failures—Discuss how failure of management systems may contribute to accidents. This includes lack of employee training, inconsistent enforcement of safety rules and failure to provide safety equipment.

### Performing an Accident Investigation

Quick response by the accident investigation team is critical in obtaining evidence and witness accounts. Armed with all the facts, the investigation team can better understand the root cause of the accident and identify possible corrective action.

- Record the name of the injured employee, their department, and supervisor.
- Draw a diagram of the scene. Include the location of employees, witnesses, equipment and any other pertinent information.
- Take several photos of the accident scene.
- Record all observations made at the scene, including environmental conditions, date and time of the accident, machine or equipment involved, task being performed, and specific location(s) in the facility.
- Obtain witness accounts of the accident. Interview only one witness at a time and ask open-ended questions. Emphasize prevention, and never place blame on any employee or witness.

### Developing Corrective Actions

Timely corrective action that prevents recurrence is the goal of any accident investigation. Avoid jumping to the conclusion that the accident was caused by an employee's unsafe acts. For example, consider an employee who slips on a wet floor near the building entrance on a snowy day. The employee knows that snow gets tracked inside and may cause puddles. Is it sufficient to attribute the accident to an unsafe act by the employee who walked through an area

known to be slippery during snowy conditions? Is recommending that the employee "pay better attention to his surroundings" likely to prevent a similar accident in the future?

Most accident investigators would agree that the accident described above is not due to an unsafe act by the employee. Instead, corrective actions may include extra mats by entrances during inclement weather and replacing or drying saturated mats (unsafe condition), training all employees to report water puddles as soon as they are noticed (management system), and placing warning signs in any wet areas (management system).

### Using Accident Investigation to Improve the Safety Program

The benefits of an accident investigation program do not end with correcting the issues specifically related to one accident or near miss. Look for trends in the types of accidents that are occurring and the causes that are identified. For example, if "lack of training" repeatedly shows up as a contributing factor, take a serious look at the employee orientation program and whether or not there is adequate refresher training for current employees.

If similar accidents continue to occur, it indicates previous corrective actions were ineffective and additional changes are needed. Likewise, it might signify the need for additional training for the accident investigation team so they are better able to determine the root causes of accidents and make the proper recommendations for corrective action.

### For Additional Information

**EMC Insurance Companies:** [www.emcins.com](http://www.emcins.com)

- Safety by Topic – Safety Management and Culture

**Occupational Safety and Health Administration:** [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov)