

Incident Investigation

Definitions of Basic Terms

- **Accident** — An unplanned incident resulting in an event that has caused — or can cause— physical harm and or property damage.
- **Near Miss or Near Accident** — An unplanned incident that does not result in an injury or property damage; it has the potential to inflict injury or property damage if not corrected. Near misses equate to 75% of industrial injuries!
- **Hazards** — Any existing or potential condition or procedure which, by itself or through interaction with other variables, may result in death, injury or property damage.
- **Hazard Recognition** — Establish a program to recognize, evaluate and eliminate unsafe acts and conditions from the work environment.

What Is an Incident Investigation?

An organized and planned collection of facts. An incident investigation:

- Documents the who, what, where and when of the near miss or accident.
- Helps in the development of a remedy to correct the unsafe condition, act and work practice.
- Is never used to place blame.

Written Plan for an Investigation

Develop, write and practice often the organization's incident investigation plan. An effective plan contains:

- Authority from senior management to conduct necessary investigations.
- Names of the individuals in charge of the investigations.
- Means to quickly notify the investigating team.
- Instructions on the use of special equipment to be worn or brought to the scene.
- Incident investigation procedures.

Reporting Accidents

Write a comprehensive accident report — include the findings, causes, and recommended corrective actions.

Conducting the Investigation

- Isolate the incident investigation area.
- Permit the emergency response personnel (police, firefighters) to perform their duties — as soon as these procedures are completed and the injured are treated, isolate the area.
- Block off the entire area surrounding the scene with barriers or yellow tape.
- Use a systematic approach to the investigation.
- Look for the basic or root cause that contributed directly or indirectly to the accident.
- Note any deficiencies in management

- Make a permanent record of the evidence — follow the rule of thumb: *when in doubt, record it!*
 - Written notes/sketches
 - Photography
 - Videotape
 - Dictated observation
 - Diagrams

- Interview witnesses:
 - Conduct the interview as soon as possible at the accident site.
 - Conduct interviews in a one-on-one setting.
 - Relax the interviewee by explaining the process.
 - Don't ask questions that require a simple yes or no answer — use an open-ended format.
 - Be a good listener, take notes and review what you heard.

OSHA Recordkeeping Requirements

Injuries/illnesses must be recorded if they result in any of the following:

- Death
- Days away from work
- Restricted work or transfer to another job
- Medical treatment beyond first aid

Remember — The purpose of an incident investigation is to record the findings and causes, and to make recommendations to prevent recurrence — not to place blame.