

Effective Accident Investigations Key to Injury Prevention Strategy

Whether you have a consistent number of small workers' compensation claims or the occasional catastrophic injury, conducting a proper accident investigation is a key tool for employers to control their workers' compensation expenses. An effective accident investigation can shed light on the root cause of an accident and provide ideas for corrective actions to minimize the chances of similar accidents from happening in the future. As an added benefit, documentation from an accident investigation can also be helpful in the claims management process.

Knowing **how** to conduct a proper accident investigation is critical and involves six key elements – (1) timely reporting of incidents, (2) using the right investigative techniques, (3) identifying the root cause of accidents, (4) analyzing information and data collected during the investigation, (5) taking corrective actions and (6) maintaining proper records.

The first priority after any on-the-job injury is to make sure your employee gets the proper treatment as quickly as possible. Once your employee is taken care of, the next step is to secure the accident scene, taking care to preserve any evidence from the injury. You should interview the injured employee, their supervisor and any other eyewitnesses to the accident. Pursue the "Five Whys" – Who, What, When, Why and Where.

Examples of questions you might ask eyewitnesses include:

- What did you see?
- What did you hear?
- Where were you at the time of the accident?
- What do you think caused the accident?
- Was there anything different today than a normal day?

Examples of questions you might ask supervisors include:

- What is normal procedure for the activity involved in the accident?
- What type of training did the employee have?
- Is there anything that could have prevented the accident?

The goal of your interviews is to determine what was abnormal at the time of the accident, where this abnormality occurred, when it was first noted and how did it occur. Generally, workplace accidents result from a combination of unsafe conditions in the work environment, faulty equipment and materials, and unsafe actions by the employee.

Once all of this information is captured, someone in the company (other than the person who conducted the investigation) should analyze the information to determine a clear picture of what happened and identify necessary corrective actions. Over time, employers can begin to identify trends and prioritize safety actions.