

Investigate Causes of All Workplace Injuries

OSHA encourages employers to investigate all accidents in which a worker was hurt, as well as close calls — sometimes called "near misses" — in which an individual might have been injured if the circumstances had been slightly different.

The agency suggests using the term "incident investigation," since nearly all accidents are preventable.

Reasons to investigate

Investigating a worksite incident — whether a fatality, injury, illness or close call — provides employers and workers the opportunity to identify hazards in their operation and shortcomings in their safety and health programs.

Most importantly, it enables employers and employees to identify and implement the corrective actions necessary to prevent future incidents.

Incident investigations that focus on identifying and correcting root causes, and not on finding fault or blame, also improve workplace morale and increase productivity.

The purpose of the investigation is to:

- Establish the facts,
- Find the real causes(s),
- Determine responsibility for the accident,
- Gather sufficient evidence, and
- Support a strong liability defense.

Such investigations should include managers and employees working together, since each bring different knowledge, understanding and perspectives to the investigation.

Following an incident, you should:

- Gather all pertinent information through interviews.
- Collect the necessary forms and documents to prove your company has met its legal, safety and insurance requirements.
- Identify, fix and communicate all known potential hazards to your employees.
- Be sure you don't overlook any documents, evidence or details that can add to the company's liability defense.

Failure to investigate

Without conducting an incident investigation to discover what happened and why, proving you've met your obligation is an uphill battle, and one that could hurt your company in several ways, including:

- Higher costs, fines, legal fees, damages, medical fees and insurance premiums.
- Poor public relations in your local community that the company is not caring for employees, making it difficult to hire and retain workers.
- A strain on operations, by having to hire and train new workers.

You have an obligation to report any serious incidents to OSHA within eight hours for a fatality, and 24 hours for a severe injury. Remind supervisors and managers to choose their words carefully when speaking to OSHA or inspectors and investigators.

For more information on accident/incident investigations, give us a call.

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