

## **Accident Investigation**

### *Making it an Essential Part of Your Accident Prevention Program*

Before you can have an effective accident investigation program, it is important to understand why colleges should have a formal accident investigation process. Next is to know who is responsible for conducting accident investigations, (is it one person or a group of people) as well as to understand what role each employee has in the accident reporting process.

Accident investigation is a device for preventing future accidents...it is a key part of your Risk Management program. Accidents, especially work related accidents, are the largest driver in insurance costs for every one of the colleges. By implementing an accident investigation program that includes a customized training component, you'll be taking the first steps to reduce that driver. First let's review the principals of Accident Investigation.

The purpose of an accident investigation is to:

- Determine what events lead up to the accident,
- Recognize the source of the accident, and
- Implementing prevention measures.

Conduct accident investigations with **prevention** in mind...**not** to place blame.

Accidents are unplanned events that result in personal injury or property damage. The focus of this article will be on personal injuries. These can be minor, requiring little or no treatment or major, requiring significant lost time. A key element of your program is that you investigate all accidents regardless of the extent of the injury or damage. "Today's bruised knuckles may become tomorrow's fractured hand without pinpointing and correcting the cause of the injury."

Accidents are part of a broad group of events that adversely affect the completion of a task. They are usually complex and may have 10 or more events that can be causes. An accident only results when a person or object receives and amount of energy or hazardous material that cannot be absorbed safely. Your analysis of the accident will normally reveal three cause levels:

#### **Basic Cause**

- Management Safety Policy & Decisions, Personal Factors, Environmental Factors

#### **Indirect**

- Unsafe Act or Unsafe Condition

#### **Direct**

- Unplanned Release of Energy and/or Hazardous Material

Most accidents are preventable by eliminating one or more causes. The investigation process will determine not only what happened but also how and why. Information gained can prevent occurrences of similar or more catastrophic accidents. The investigator needs to be interested in each event as well as the sequence of the events that led to the accident. The type of accident is also important. Recurrence of accidents of a particular type or those with common causes show areas needing special prevention emphasis.

The actual process used will depend on the nature, location, and results of the accident. The investor should follow the following steps when conducting an investigation:

- Have a description of the accident
- Have an understanding of the normal operations (pre accident conditions)
- Have maps/floor plans of the site
- Obtain a list of witnesses
- Develop a list of events the preceded the accident

When at the accident site:

- First, make sure medical assistance has been summoned, if necessary
- Secure the area – DO NOT disturb the scene UNLESS a hazard exists
- Note your observations as you approach the site
- Take photos taking time to record each one for accurate records
- Request specific information for the review process, e.g.
  - Specific procedures
  - Equipment manuals

Interviewing process (victim and witnesses):

- If possible, keep witness separated so “information” isn’t shared
- Interview promptly
  - Those that were present
  - Those that arrived at the site shortly after the incident
- Ask open ended questions
- Listen for facts (location, contributing factors, specific remarks)
- Record statement, written or tape recorded, keeping accurate records

From your investigation, determine:

- What was not normal before the accident
- Where the abnormality occurred
- When it was first noted
- How it occurred

This information should help you determine:

- Why the accident occurred
- The likely sequence of events and probable causes (direct, indirect, basic)
- Alternative sequences
- The most probable cause

Your next step is to conduct a “post investigation” or debriefing process. This will include:

- A summary of your report, (who, what, when, where, why)
- Recommended prevention actions
- Recognition of those who assisted in the investigation process
- Steps that could be taken to improve the investigation process

The information provided in this article is just the “tip of the iceberg” in the accident investigation process. For your accident investigation process to be successful, your investigators need to have actual training in the process. This training will provide the investigators the necessary tools to be able to determine not only what happened, but also to find out how and why the accident occurred, and what efforts can be put in place to prevent the accident from reoccurring – PREVENTION.

As part of DMI’s service agreement with United Heartland, the Loss Control Consultants assigned to each of the colleges are willing and ready to provide **FREE** Accident Investigation Training for your college. This training can be customized for supervisors, instructors, or safety teams. This training is just a phone call/email away...consider this as part of your In-Service Training, or Safety Team professional development. If you have any questions on this training, please contact Kim Cecchi by phone at (262) 787-7682 or by email at [kim.cecchi@unitedheartland.biz](mailto:kim.cecchi@unitedheartland.biz)