

## Supervisor Incident Investigations

**Safety, production and quality work are all part of a supervisor's job. When an injury incident occurs, all three parts of the supervisor's job are affected. Safety is affected because the company's safety and health procedures failed somehow, resulting in an injury. Production may be impacted due to the loss of a worker from the crew. The quality of the product or service the company provides is affected when damage to equipment and material occurs too.**

Front-line supervisors have a key role in ensuring employee safety. This role begins with the control of workplace hazards and prevention of incidents. Supervisors are the focal point for implementing an effective injury and illness prevention program. Supervisor responsibilities should include: participating in new employee safety orientations; providing job specific safety training; leading crew safety meetings; administering disciplinary actions; participating in safety inspections; and completing incident investigations.

Incident investigation is an important element of safety programs. It provides a concise, systematic and thorough approach for gathering facts. This information will lead to corrective actions aimed at preventing or reducing the possibility of similar incidents. An investigation allows you to piece information together to better understand safety program failures or recognize loss trends. A well-defined investigation process will save time by allowing the supervisor to focus their attention on the root cause, instead of looking in all different directions in an effort to stop incidents.

### PREVENTION OF FUTURE INCIDENTS SHOULD BE THE ONLY GOAL OF AN INVESTIGATION.

Unfortunately, employees often believe that an investigation is performed only to place fault on someone for the events that have already taken place. Looking for fault will slow or stop the chance of locating the root cause. Prior to starting, the purpose of the investigation should be explained. Inform employees that both the supervisors and the company are concerned about the injured person and how the incident occurred. Also let them know that the intent of the investigation is to learn if any changes need to be implemented to prevent a similar injury from occurring in the future.

### GUIDELINES

Think of an incident as "the result of a malfunction or inadequacy in the safety program." By using this definition, it encourages good investigative efforts. Looking for a malfunction in the system will help direct supervisors towards meaningful data regarding the incident. But which incidents should be investigated?

All injury incidents and "near-miss" incidents should be investigated regardless of whether anyone was actually injured. The level of detail in the investigation varies with the severity of the injury or injuries. Thorough investigations must be completed for all serious injuries and fatalities. Gathering factual information is critical. The best information is always that which is learned immediately after the incident. Therefore, the investigation should occur as soon as possible. Any unnecessary delay can result in changes of initial observations and possible removal of important evidence. Witness interviews (including the injured worker, if possible) and a visual inspection of the site are essential. Both require interviewing and observation skills by the supervisor. If an incident is not investigated immediately, witnesses may recall things they believe they saw, or at times they may innocently convey inaccurately what another person discussed with them regarding the incident.



## COMPONENTS OF THE REPORT

The investigation must include sufficient data to help gather enough information to conduct a quality analysis. The key basic data components of the Supervisor's Incident Investigation report are:

### 1. Employee and Incident Information

Employee's name

Employee's occupation or job position

Employee's date of hire

How many years of experience does the employee have in this occupation or job position?

Date and time of the incident

Date and time when was the incident reported to the supervisor

What body parts were reported as injured?

Was first aid treatment provided?

### 2. Description

What was the employee doing at the time of the incident?

Where did the incident occur?

How did the incident occur?

Was the employee working with others and if so, what are their names?

Were there any witnesses to the incident, and if so, what are their names?

Was the incident caused by someone other than the employee or fellow employees?

Describe any equipment, tools, or products that were directly involved, and whether they were determined to be in good condition and working properly.

Describe the working environment. Consider factors such as weather, housekeeping, lighting, and noise.

### 3. The Use and Nature of Preventative Measures

Was any required personal protective equipment (PPE) worn?

Was the employee properly trained for the task being performed at the time?

Are there standard written procedures established for the task being performed? If yes, were standard procedures followed? If not, how did the employee's actions deviate from the procedures?

Were adequate machinery or equipment guards in place?

### 4. Corrective Actions and Conclusions

What do you believe are the root cause or causes of the incident?

What action or actions have already been taken to prevent recurrence?

What additional actions, if any, are recommended as a result of your investigation findings?

Gathering the information necessary to complete a thorough Supervisor's Incident Investigation report will allow the supervisor to conduct effective analysis. It is also important to note that depending upon the nature of your company's operations and the circumstances surrounding the incident, additional components and questions may be appropriate for your customized investigation report format.

## ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

Many supervisors often conclude that incidents were caused by "careless" employees. This is usually not the case. Incidents are more likely caused by deficiencies in the injury and illness prevention program. These deficiencies could include: inadequate training; lack of safety policy enforcement; lack of adequate equipment maintenance; or lack

of guidance. Lack of guidance can mislead an employee into completing tasks by "doing whatever it takes to get the job done" without regard for safety or company procedures.

The analysis should try to determine the root cause(s), and identify necessary corrective actions to implement with the goal being to prevent recurrences. An effective analysis should produce findings such as:

1. Identification and location of principle sources of incidents by determining the materials, machines, and tools most frequently involved, and the job tasks most likely to produce injuries.
2. Disclosure of the nature and size of incident problems in specific departments and among specific occupations.
3. Indication of the need for engineering revisions by identifying principle hazards of various types of equipment and/or materials.
4. Disclosure of inefficiencies in operating processes and procedures. Possibilities include identification of poor layout, which contributes to incidents, or of physically demanding methods, which could be eliminated by using mechanical handling devices when possible.
5. Disclosure of unsafe practices to be remedied by additional training for employees or by changing to safer work methods.
6. Providing information about hazards and unsafe practices in departments so that the time available for safety training is used effectively.
7. Permitting the overall evaluation of the safety program through continuing analysis of the effects of corrective actions taken, training techniques implemented, and any other methods utilized for controlling recurrences.



By placing the emphasis on gathering facts, the entire investigation process will utilize a more fair and impartial approach. Always keep in mind that the primary goal of the investigation is to obtain information to help prevent recurrence of future incidents. The value of the investigation will be limited if the goal is to determine which individual is at fault. Gathering evidence soon after the event assists in uncovering the root cause and any incidental immediate causes of the incident. Isolating and identifying the root cause(s) will lead to direct and effective corrective actions. Findings and corrective actions should be discussed at departmental safety meetings. The thorough investigation and root cause analysis provides a great meeting topic and learning tool for employees. Any feedback and ideas from employees should always be encouraged.

