

# Accident Investigation



An accident investigation determines what, why and how the accident happened.

Accidents are unexpected, unplanned and undesirable. Yet they also offer the chance to learn a great deal about good safety and health. Accident investigation is the first step toward avoiding future injuries and financial losses. When dangerous conditions and careless attitudes are changed as a result of an accident, it can also lead to increased performance and productivity.

## Goals of the Investigation

An investigation determines what, why and how the accident happened. Its purpose is not to blame someone. A good investigation looks at how a system makes it possible for accidents to take place. Often, it will find out that many similar incidents (small, less serious accidents) have happened before. It is very helpful to investigate incidents, too.

To be useful, investigations must be honest. Sometimes it is difficult for a supervisor to perform an objective investigation in his or her own department. People from outside the department often have a helpful perspective.

## Goals An Investigation Plan

Each company and department should have a tested investigation plan. Then, if there is an accident, the plan can be put into effect immediately. Often, investigators must move quickly.

A written plan may include:

- Who is in charge;
- The complete Chain of Command listing all those to be notified and when, including at night and on weekends;
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) which should be at the scene;
- Special transportation or communication needs;
- How to gain access to the site for as long as necessary;
- Who will record interviews of supervisors, employees involved in the accident, and other witnesses;
- Who will take photographs and gather evidence that might be destroyed or changed, such as weather conditions or contaminated clothing;
- Who will prepare the final report.

## After The Investigation

Following the investigation, investigators will usually write an accident investigation report. The report may include a description of causes and suggested corrections. A good report is accurate, detailed and produced soon after the accident.

## Fix The Problem, Not The Blame

Everyone involved, including supervisors and employees, should be helpful and honest during an investigation. When a complete understanding of the accident emerges, this can make it less likely that a similar accident will happen again. From giving information to learning from the investigation, supervisors and employees can help in many ways to ensure worksite safety. The desired outcome of the investigation should be to fix the problem, not the blame.