
Incident/accident investigation, a tool for prevention

When an injury or illness occurs, it may be a symptom that something is wrong in your organization's safety process. A thorough, well-documented incident/accident investigation will identify this problem and lessen the chance of its recurrence.

The principal investigator for all injuries and work-related incidents and accidents is the employee's supervisor. The supervisor understands the process and knows the injured worker. The safety process coordinator is available to assist the supervisor with the investigation of the incident that led up to the injury or illness.

The key to good injury and illness investigations is having qualified investigators. The BWC Division of Safety & Hygiene has resources that can help your supervisors improve their investigative skills.

What injuries and illnesses should be investigated? At a minimum, all OSHA recordable injuries and illnesses should be investigated. Some employers also investigate near-miss incidents and frequently occurring first aid cases.

A basic injury and illness investigation includes:

- Care for the injured
- Inspect the scene
- Interview witnesses and the injured employee
- Determine the causes of the injury or illness
- Identify corrective actions to prevent recurrence
- Complete a supervisor's accident investigation report
- Implement recommended corrective actions
- Follow-up periodically to ensure the problem has not re-surfaced

The safety process coordinator receives a copy of all supervisors' injury and illness investigation reports and reviews each one for quality and thoroughness. The safety process coordinator follows up to be sure the appropriate corrective action has been taken to prevent this injury or illness from happening again.

The safety process coordinator should be familiar with OSHA recordkeeping and injury and illness reporting requirements. These responsibilities can be delegated to a clerical person, but the safety process coordinator should train this person and conduct periodic audits to ensure required procedures are being followed.

The Division of Safety & Hygiene's safety, industrial hygiene and ergonomics specialists can help you develop effective strategies to make your workplace safer and healthier. They can visit your workplace or consult with you by telephone or email. These services are available for any private or public employer. BWC also offers specialized options for certain employers. You can request these services online at: info.bwc.ohio.gov or 1.800.644.6292

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