



Toolbox Talks

Accident Investigation



An accident investigation is recommended after every worksite incident, which may be an injury or fatality, an illness, property damage, or a close call.

The investigation is seeking to answer these questions:

- What happened?
- How did it happen?
- Why did it happen?
- What needs to be corrected so it doesn't happen again?

Before an accident investigation begins, all emergency response actions need to be completed, and the incident site must be safe and secure for entry and investigation.

➤ Incident investigations are often conducted by a supervisor, but to be most effective, these investigations should include managers and employees working together, since each bring different knowledge, understanding, and perspectives to the investigation.

OSHA recommends a four-step systems approach to incident investigations.

Step 1 – Preserve and Document the Scene. Preserve the integrity of incident location and prevent material evidence from being removed or altered. Use cones, tape, or other means of guarding to prevent unauthorized entry.

Step 2 – Collect Information. Visit the scene to take photos, collect physical evidence, and draw diagrams. Interview victims, witnesses, managers, and personnel familiar with normal operating procedures.

Step 3 – Determine Root Causes. Once the contributing factors are identified, further explore why and how those factors became the hazard that led to the incident. This is called Root Cause Analysis, and it is the part of the investigation process that will determine the underlying issues and weaknesses in the system or procedures. A successful root cause analysis identifies all underlying causes. Often there is more than one.

Step 4 – Implement Corrective and Preventive Actions. Prepare a report that provides recommendations for corrective and preventive actions that address the root cause(s) of the incident. Ensure corrective actions are completed quickly and confirm that someone is assigned to follow-up on the agreed upon preventive actions.

During the investigation, focus on collecting the facts and avoid making assumptions.

- Document what the scene of the incident looks like by writing a description, taking photos, collecting video surveillance (if available) and drawing a diagram if that could be helpful.
- Create a timeline of events to track what happened before, during, and after the incident.
- Ask employees and witnesses to tell you what happened in their own words. Also interview personnel that are familiar with the facility and relevant work procedures.
- Review records that could provide more information related to the incident like maintenance logs, training records, and written policies.
- List the contributing factors (the hazards) that led to the incident and then complete a root cause analysis to identify the one or more causes of those hazards.

