

Manager/Supervisor Risk Management

#133– 3/12/13

A twice weekly e-mail training for YCPARMIA members

TOPIC: SAFETY – IIPP – INVESTIGATING ACCIDENTS

A fifth element that the State requires in the IIPP involves accident investigations. It is not uncommon for YCPARMIA members to lose focus on what the primary purpose of the investigations is. While the investigation needs to determine what happened and the causes, **the ultimate purpose is to determine what can be done to prevent similar accidents, injuries, and near misses in the future.**

Note: there is a recommended accident investigation form on the YCPARMIA website.

After documenting what happened, it is necessary to determine what the causes, both primary and contributing, were. Common causes include:

- Equipment – including inadequate, improper use, or defective protective equipment.
- Environmental – including weather, workplace, or lighting.
- Procedural – including inadequate, outdated, or unsafe work procedures.
- Training – including insufficient, lack of, or the need for retraining.
- Worker – including inattention, inadequate skills, or pre-existing injuries.
- Supervision – including inadequate or poor communication.

Any accident/injury can, and usually does, include a combination of these causes, but one cause will generally predominate. That does not mean that the employer should ignore the other contributing causes; a pattern of the causes can suggest bigger issues that need to be addressed before other injuries occur. An accident investigation that takes the simple road of blaming the injured worker without addressing the other factors is not an effective tool for reducing risks of further injury or accident. While the employee's actions might well be the predominant cause, it is not unlikely that there were other factors in play.

Another issue to consider is who should conduct the investigation. While the immediate supervisor is a logical, and often the most common, choice, they can be biased. Part of their responsibilities as supervisor is to maintain and mandate a safe work environment; in that capacity they should be interviewed as part of the accident investigation. Just about any of the contributing causes listed above can suggest inadequate supervision. It is therefore probably a "best practice" to have a more disinterested individual, with some training or experience, conduct the investigation.

The resulting written investigative report should ultimately reach the individual identified in the IIPP as having the overall responsibility and authority for the entity's safety program. But there is one more step in the process. The final and most important step, after documenting what happened and what the causes were, is to determine what can be done to reduce or eliminate this exposure in the future. That will be addressed in the next topic.

Next Topic: IIPP – Accident Investigations - Prevention