

Manager/Supervisor Risk Management

#134– 3/14/13

A twice weekly e-mail training for YCPARMIA members

TOPIC: SAFETY – IIPP – INVESTIGATING ACCIDENTS - PREVENTION

As a practical matter, the purpose of an accident investigation is to prevent future accidents. Using the facts and causes of the investigated accident, someone should be tasked with coming up with proposals that will either eliminate or limit future occurrences throughout the entity.

YCPARMIA feels that “Best Practices” would have that function fall on the entity’s Safety Committee. Assuming that they see all of the accident investigations, the Committee should have a broader perspective on what is happening throughout the organization. They should also be more experienced in evaluating exposures and possible solutions. The Committee has a certain degree of independence, and therefore has the potential to provide unbiased, or even unpopular, recommendations. Lastly, the Committee is an entity-wide body that should result in their recommendations being suitable for the entire organization; this gives the safety program consistency. But note: the Committee is making recommendations, not policy. They have no authority to implement their proposals. That authority and responsibility continues to lie with the upper management individual identified in the IIPP.

In the past, some of our member’s committees have limited their accident evaluations to determining whether the accident or injury was preventable. It is a safety cliché that if the accident was predictable it was preventable. The proper function of the committee is not to determine if it was preventable, but rather how similar accidents/injuries can be prevented in the future. These recommendations should be a regular part of the Committee’s written report to management.

Coming up with proposals to address an investigation’s identified accident/injury causes is easy. Finding solutions that are practical, economical, and timely is much more difficult. To that end, communication between the Committee and upper management must be ongoing in order for the Committee’s recommendations to have realistic value. Management’s expectations must be understood and respected, while the Committee needs to feel valued.

Currently common proposed solutions are often confined to “the employee needs to pay more attention,” or “the employee should be more careful...” Inattention or lack of care can certainly be causes of an accident/injury, but stopping there would mean that the only possible way of preventing the next injury would be to get rid of that employee. A deeper analysis should address other possible contributing causes. Looking at the involved employees equipment, training, experience, health, supervision, job procedures, and work environment are all necessary parts of the analysis. Coming up with a recommendation that improves at least one of these contributing causes fulfills the purpose of the investigation.

Next Topic: IIPP – Other Policies