

Manager/Supervisor Risk Management

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A twice weekly e-mail training for YCPARMIA members

TOPIC: SAFETY – ACCIDENT INVESTIGATIONS

The quality of an entity's accident investigations can serve as an indication of their risk tolerance; minimal effort in the process can reflect a less than consistent commitment to a safe work environment. The State requires that accidents and near misses be investigated to determine the causes, and that corrective action be taken to avoid similar accidents in the future.

Again, our members' response in this area is very inconsistent. With notable exceptions, some of the common shortfalls are:

- The investigation is superficial and incomplete with minimal effort put into the investigation/report.
- Contributing factors are ignored; analysis of cause is superficial, and seldom gets beyond inattention by the injured worker; analysis stops at the obvious and misses root causes;
- Near misses seldom, if ever, generate an investigation;
- The investigation is conducted by someone too closely involved in the accident;
- Offered solutions to prevent future accidents concentrate on the immediate, and ignore the ongoing exposure;
- Some classes of accidents, like repetitive motion injuries, do not generate an investigation; and
- There is seldom an analysis of the connection between the accident and entity policies/practices.

Too often the accident investigation report can become the end of the process; the report goes nowhere, and sometimes ends up being filed without any action. With some exceptions, the cause is identified, possible solutions are listed, and the process ends. Appropriate management never sees the report, or if they do, takes no action. Maybe most importantly, the accident reports may never make it to the individual with overall responsibility for the entity's safety programs.

Another common practice is to treat each accident investigation as a totally separate occurrence. There is no follow-up within some member entities to identify trends, or common exposures. When the investigative reports are looked at on a collective basis, the analysis concludes with the categorization as "preventable" with no corrective recommendation or action plan being generated.

Certain contributing causes are seldom mentioned in the investigation reports that YCPARMIA sees. Inadequate supervision, inadequate or outdated procedures, insufficient training, pre-existing injury, or tool inspections are seldom discussed. The simplest and most common answer, a careless employee, essentially shields everyone else from responsibility or accountability for the accident, and serves to diminish the need for any corrective action.

In summary, if an entity is going to have zero tolerance for accidents/injuries, to generate results the investigation process must be consistently aggressive enough to reflect that attitude.

Next Topic: Safety – Inconsistent Safety Committees