



Accident/Near Miss Investigation Guidelines

Accident Investigation Introduction

An accident, incident or near miss has occurred, now what? Whether it is an accident, incident or near miss, it is imperative that an accident investigation be completed and submitted within twenty-four hours of the occurrence.

The purpose of investigating accidents is as follows:

- To find out what happened so that underlying or root causes are determined.
- To prevent the occurrence from happening again, which may call for new procedures.
- To satisfy any legal requirement, such as OSHA compliance.
- Reassess safety hazards.
- Determine the cost of the occurrence and submit a workers' compensation claim (if applicable).
- Evaluate training and determine whether additional training is needed.

It is extremely important that you remember that the purpose is not to place blame. Stay objective and accurate with any facts throughout the entire process.

The value of conducting an accident investigation

It is hard to measure the actual value of investigating accidents, incidents and near misses. However, there are many factors involved that have a direct affect on your total cost of risk.

The biggest factor is the prevention of future accidents, incidents or near misses. By preventing future occurrences, the probability of major injuries will decrease as well. This will lower workers' compensation costs along with improving employee morale.

Also when these occurrences are avoided, of course, the costs associated with them disappear along with any time and energy.

How to conduct an accident investigation

When investigating an accident, it is important to remember who, what, when, where, why and how? The following procedures will aid in your investigation of these key questions:

- Get to the scene of the accident as soon as possible.
- Confirm the area is safe to enter.
- Control the area to prevent any other injuries.
- Provide medical assistance to any injured person(s).
- Find any witnesses to the accident.
- Conduct the accident investigation. Be sure to use photos or sketches (label with date and time) and safeguard any evidence.
- Complete an accident investigation report in which the possible causes are identified, all facts and testimonies are reported and any recommendations that will remedy the problem are made.

It is also recommended that your company keep the following on hand to aid in this process: pens, notebooks, cameras, tape recorders, measuring tape, personal protective equipment, and copies of any accident investigation reports.

Remember that investigating takes time and energy—DO NOT TAKE THE EASY WAY OUT!

How to interview witnesses

The following are recommended guidelines when interviewing witnesses:

- Interview *everyone* involved.
- Keep all witnesses apart.
- Conduct the interviews as soon after the event as possible.
- Make sure the witnesses feel safe and comfortable talking to you.
- Provide comfort for any witnesses in need. Being witness to an accident can be stressful, be sure to provide a moment for people to calm down and recall the incident accurately.
- Stress that the purpose of the interview is to establish what happened and why (not to place any blame on anyone).
- LISTEN!
- Read the witness's statement back to them to confirm everything is correct.
- Take notes or record the interview.
- Ask questions that cannot be answered with only a "yes" or "no".
- Do not lead or intimidate the witness.
- End the interview on a positive note.

It is your decision on whether to interview witnesses in private or at the scene of the accident. Interviewing witnesses in a quiet, private environment ensures the witness's privacy. However, it may be useful to conduct the interview at the scene of the accident so that the witness is able to show you what happened.

It is important to remember when interviewing witnesses that some accounts will differ from others. It is your responsibility to determine fact from someone's opinion. Also remember that your attitude and actions have a direct affect on the outcome of the investigation.

How to conduct a near miss investigation

A near miss is an incident where, given a slight shift in time or distance, injury or damage easily could have occurred but didn't. There is a lot that can be learned by investigating a near miss. These investigations can prevent serious accidents in the future and the opportunity to learn from a near miss should not be lost. When investigating near misses, the procedures are similar to that of accidents with the absence of any injuries. It is extremely important to uncover every action that led to the near miss so that an accident will be avoided in the future. The following procedures will aid in your investigation:

- Get to the scene of the near miss as soon as possible.
- Confirm the area is safe to enter.
- Control the area to prevent any injuries.
- Find any witnesses to the near miss.
- Conduct the near miss investigation.
- Complete a near miss investigation report in which the possible causes are identified, all facts and testimonies are reported and any recommendations that will remedy the problem are made.

Information Gathering Guidelines

The following are more detailed guidelines for accident or near miss investigations. Not everything on this list will be applicable for any given accident. The more serious the accident, the greater the depth of investigation is likely to be. The main purpose of the investigation is to find all that can be learned to support the goal of preventing similar accidents/near misses in the future. The information gathered from the investigation can help the safety committee, supervisors, and injury management coordinator to do their job and improve processes, culture, and training.

Obtain General Information

Getting a “picture” of the scene of the accident is critical. The environment where the accident occurred will change quickly once the location is being utilized again for business operations. You must capture, as precisely as possible, the complete environment of the accident or near miss scene.

- Has anything been altered since the accident/near miss?
- Names of injured employees, witnesses, and first people on the scene.
- Extent of any injuries and damage.
- The condition of any equipment involved in the accident.
- Any chemicals or substances in use at the time of the accident or present at the accident site.
- The task or processes that were taking place at the time of the accident/near miss.
- The time, place, and layout of the area where the accident occurred.
- The environmental conditions (lighting, ventilation, floor condition, obstructions, weather conditions if outside).
- Record environment and conditions (using cameras, video, sketches).

Obtain Witness Statements

Having documented the environment, the next piece of the puzzle is to determine what actually happened. Witness statements are critical to gaining a complete understanding of the accident/near miss. Be sure to listen carefully (record the interview if possible) and don’t “lead” the witnesses with your pre-conceived ideas of what happened.

- Record name, contact details and job title (if an employee) or occupation (if not an employee) of witness.
- Capture every detail possible of what the witness observed and what action, if any, they took.

Establish Circumstances

Now that you have a physical “picture” of the environment and you have a sense of the series of events leading up to the accident (witness statements) it is time to do a little detective work to determine the circumstances surrounding the event.

- What was being done at the time of the accident/near miss and what happened?
- What were the events leading up to the accident?
- What was the accepted method for carrying out the task? Was it being followed? Was it adequate?
- Was the individual competent to carry out the task (qualifications / experience) ?

- What instruction and training was given?
- Were they aware of the hazard analysis for their job/task? (did they know how they might be harmed and the appropriate measures to take to prevent harm?)
- Had the individuals been told to carry out the task, was it a “normal” part of their job duties, or were they acting on their own initiative?
- Had something similar ever happened previously? If so, what changes were put into place to prevent the incident and were those new processes/procedures being followed?

Immediate Response to Accident/Near Miss

One of the key areas of discussion within WorkCompEdge is what occurs during the first 24 hours after an injury. When investigating an accident, you have the opportunity to confirm that everyone knows what to do during this critical time window.

Use a copy of the WorkCompEdge recommended 24 Hour Injury Response Plan (or your company's modified version of this document) and verify that each step in the process was completed. If not, note this and determine why. (For 24 Hour Injury Response Plan see WorkCompEdge module: [The Clock Is Ticking—Things You Must Do in the First 24 Hours After an Injury](#)).

Identify Preventative Measures

Obviously, there were measures in place to prevent the accident or near miss that occurred. It is important to identify these measure and reassess the appropriateness and effectiveness.

- Was there an up to date hazard analysis carried out for this task/job?
- Review the hazard analysis for the task/job. Is it complete and accurate in light of the event?
- What safety precautions were in place and what safety precautions should have been in place?
- Was instruction and training provided for the task/job?
- Was the instruction and training that was provided appropriate?

Identify Underlying Causes

After gathering all the above information, you need to determine, to the best of your ability, the underlying cause of the accident. This may involve judgment and some subjective decision making. But, it is a necessary step - even if you are not 100% certain - to determine the cause so you can propose a plan to prevent future similar events.

- Was supervision and training adequate?
- Was equipment suitable for the task?
- Was equipment maintained and tested adequately?
- What pressures / constraints, if any, were being applied?
- Was communication adequate between relevant parties?

Actions to Prevent a Recurrence

The main goal of an accident or near miss investigation is to determine action that can be taken to prevent future similar events. Based on all the information gathered and the analysis up to this point, you must now determine specific actions that can be taken to prevent future accidents from occurring.

- Could the outcome have been more serious?
- What specifically needs to be done to prevent similar accidents/near misses?
- Were the safety precautions adequate, but not implemented - why not?
- Actions to prevent recurrence might include:
 1. Better guarding or barriers.
 2. Better test and maintenance schedules.
 3. Revised work method.
 4. Provision and use of personal protective equipment.
 5. Improved supervision, training, inspection, instruction and information.
 6. Better communication.
 7. Review of similar activities or tasks elsewhere in the organization.

Accident investigation forms are included in the WorkCompEdge module: [The Clock Is Ticking—Things You Must Do in the First 24 Hours After an Injury](#).