

Dig Deeper into Workplace Accidents

The main purpose of any accident or injury investigation is to determine the root cause and contributing factors surrounding the accident so the appropriate corrective actions can be implemented to prevent a similar accident or injury in the future. Digging deeper into workplace accidents helps your company better understand factors contributing to losses, involves employees at all levels, reduces injury frequency, and strengthens your company's overall safety program.



These steps are necessary when conducting a good accident investigation:

1. Determine what happened.

- Talk to the employee involved in the accident. Stress to the employee the goal is not to find blame or embarrass the employee.
- Let the employee describe the incident in his or her own words, assuming he or she does not need immediate medical attention.
- Avoid words used in law enforcement or in a jury trial (e.g., witness, statement, investigation, plaintiff, etc.).
- Interview all employees who may have witnessed the accident. Interview each employee separately. Try to remember all the relevant facts and avoid writing every time the participant speaks. If there are disagreements, make a note and review these areas at a different time.
- Interview witnesses as soon as possible following an incident to maintain the integrity of witness statements. Employees talk and interpretations of what took place change quickly.

2. Collect the details of the incident.

- Determine the body part involved in the injury and source of the injury. What was the object, substance, or body movement that produced the injury?
- What were the hazardous conditions that contributed to the accident?

- Where did the injury occur? Describe the location, weather, time of day, visibility, etc.
- Were there any unsafe acts that caused or contributed to the injury?
- Dig deeper. Don't fall short of the root cause by accepting easy answers such as, "The employee took a shortcut, the floor was wet, etc." Why was the floor wet? A missing wet floor sign doesn't explain why the floor was wet in the first place. Why was the employee able to take a shortcut?

3. Gather information and determine which items are important.

- The information gathered should be compared periodically to other accident investigations to determine if patterns develop that suggest the likelihood of reoccurrence.
- Gathering facts will help determine and justify if changes are needed in procedures, equipment, workstation layout, job hazard analysis, projects, etc.
- Opportunities for training and retraining will be uncovered.
- The information will help evaluate the overall progress of the company's safety program and pinpoint the information that's most crucial.

continued...

4. Listen to employees.

- Ask the employee to offer solutions or preventative measures.
- Encourage suggestions that address root causes identified. Don't accept response such as, "I should have been more careful" or "I should have used the guard." Push for suggestions that are "fool proof."
- Avoid blanket statements like "This won't work" or "It will cost too much money."
- This is an opportunity to gain traction with the safety program and increase employee commitment.

5. Complete the written report and summarize the findings.

- Reach a consensus on what concrete steps can be taken to eliminate the hazard or correct the behavior that resulted in the injury.
- Communicate this change or corrective action to your lead managers or foremen.
- Circle back and check in with all participants to make sure the agreed-upon changes are working. If they aren't, make necessary adjustments.
- Notify the departments of the changes with the next scheduled safety inspection.

To further develop accident reporting and investigations, please refer to these resources located at <https://www.thesilverlining.com/safety>.

- Accident Investigation - Injury Review Process
- Employee Accident Investigation Report
- Supervisor Accident Investigation Report
- Accident Reporting Tri-Fold Fleet Report
- Workers' Compensation Claim Kits by State
- Accident Procedures: Driver Training Series 20-minute Video
- If You've Had a Loss
- Interviewing an Injured Worker