

Accident Investigation: Finding Fact, Not Fault



8 steps to conducting an accident investigation

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On-demand Webinar: Conducting an Effective Accident Investigation

FREE to view detailed
information covered
includes:

- When to conduct an accident investigation
- Conducting interviews and identifying potential witnesses
- Preparing the investigation reports and root cause analysis

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Although there are currently no specific OSHA standards for accident investigation, Chesapeake Employers has developed these tips based on best practices in this area. As a rule, all accidents and incidents should be investigated, regardless of their severity.

Ultimately, you are trying to determine the facts about the accident – who, what, when, where, why and how. Follow these eight steps to ensure a thorough accident investigation:

1. Respond to the emergency –

- First, see that any injured person receives medical attention, if needed.
- Second, secure the area; use barricades or caution tape to keep people from changing the scene in any way.
- Follow your company procedures to shut down the involved equipment or area until it is safe.

2. Collect evidence and record data –

- Begin gathering information to determine what happened.
- Inspect and record any physical characteristics or conditions of the accident site.
- Preserve any physical evidence, such as potentially defective equipment.
- Take photos to help preserve the scene.

3. Conduct interviews and identify potential witnesses –

- Find out whether any employees saw or heard anything that may explain the incident.
- Talk to individuals separately. Interviews should be done as soon after the accident as possible while the facts are still fresh in people's minds.
- Obtaining signed statements as soon as possible following an accident, incident, or near miss ensures that you have an accurate account of how the event occurred.

4. Prepare the investigation reports –

Fill out the appropriate Chesapeake Employers' accident investigation form(s), giving an accurate accounting of all the facts. These forms are available in English and Spanish at www.ceicwc.com.

5. Review the data –

Review all accident investigation documentation as soon as possible with the following in mind:

- Are all the facts consistent with each other?
- Has all the documentation been completed thoroughly?
- What could have contributed to the accident?
- What could have failed or did not occur that could have caused the incident?
- Has a previous action been taken to correct this problem? If so, what was it? Why did it fail this time?

6. Root cause analysis –

The supervisor or accident investigator should take care when describing the cause of the accident or incident to make sure it is described both accurately and clearly. He or she should identify all possible causes, preventions and controls. Causal factors may include:

- equipment,
- the environment, or
- people.

7. Implement corrective actions –

Determine how the information gathered in your accident investigation can be used to implement corrective measures to prevent accidents and injuries from occurring in the future. Follow your organization's protocol for making any necessary changes. Corrective actions can include:

- Eliminating the hazard (most effective);
- Engineering solutions;
- Administrative changes;
- Training;
- Personal protective equipment;
- Labeling/warning signs (least effective).

8. Follow up –

- Check back regularly with those who experienced the accident or incident to ensure the appropriate remedies have been put in place and are working as intended.
- Be sure to update your organization's safety policy with any changes that resulted from recommendations made as a result of your investigation.

REMEMBER to Complete the Accident Investigation Forms When You Have a Workplace Injury



After your injured worker has received medical treatment and you have reported the injury to Chesapeake, the next important step is to conduct the accident investigation using the three Accident Investigation Forms. **The forms are included in your Employers' Handbook and can be downloaded from the Chesapeake Employers' website. These forms are also available in Spanish.**

Accident investigation forms/statements should be filled out by the:

- injured employee
- supervisor
- and any witness(es) to the accident

Train your supervisors to conduct the preliminary investigation as soon as possible. Care must be taken to assure the investigation is fact finding, not fault finding. The injured worker's memory of the details around the accident may change over time. Obtaining signed statements as soon as possible following an accident ensures that you, the employer, have an accurate account of how the injury occurred. The completed forms also help to spot possible third-party liability as well as possible fraudulent claims.

Investigation Forms Q&A

Q. After I have these forms completed, what do I do with them?

Please mail or fax the completed and signed forms to your claims adjuster and keep a copy for your files. These completed forms can provide valuable information in a claims investigation of an injury and for developing the defense in the event of a workers' comp hearing.

Q. What if my employee refuses to fill out or sign an Employee's Report of Injury?

Of course, you cannot make an employee fill out the document. You can, however, stress the importance of getting his or her account of the accident to set the record straight and to help prevent the accident from happening again. Also, still obtain the supervisor's report as well as any witness statements.

Q. What if my employee has retained an attorney? Can I still ask the injured employee to fill out an Employee's Report of Injury?

Yes. You, the employer, as part of your company's accident management plan, can still ask the employee to fill out the report form.

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