

SEVEN STEPS TO BETTER ACCIDENT INVESTIGATIONS

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I recently had to call a Site Superintendent on a major construction site to talk to him about an accident that had happened the day before. An employee had fallen through an opening in a roof and fell 20 feet. Fortunately, the employee only sustained a broken wrist. As I was talking to the superintendent I was trying to determine what had happened that caused the accident.

The superintendent did not have any idea why the accident happened at that point. I then took the opportunity to walk the superintendent through the Seven Steps to Better Accident Investigations. After I had finished the process both the superintendent and I had a clear idea of why the accident happened and what we could do to prevent this from happening in the future.

I often read Accident Investigation Reports that are not filled out in detail or done correctly. I understand that most supervisors are not highly trained safety professionals and many times the amount of training they have received is limited. It is however, a critical part of accident prevention, it determines the actual causes of an accident and taking the corrective actions necessary to prevent this from happening in the future.

The Seven Steps to Better Accident Investigation provides an excellent tool for supervisors to use and it is easy to follow. Also, it will provide valuable input that will allow you to improve your Safety Program.

The following are the Seven Steps:

- 1) Was there a written procedure covering the activities that the employee was performing when the accident took place? Safe Operating Procedures (S.O.P.) are an essential part of an effective Safety Program. There can only be one right safest way to do a job and that should be clearly spelled out in writing.
- 2) Did the written procedures in place specifically cover the type of work the employee was doing at the time of the accident? This is important, because even if there is a written procedure it may be out of date or vague. When was it updated and who updated it?
- 3) Was there training covering this written procedure? If so, when was the training conducted and who performed the training?
- 4) Was the employee involved in the accident trained? Was the training specific and had it been conducted recently?
- 5) Was there proper tools and equipment necessary to do the job safely? Employees often use defective tools and equipment. Who reviews this requirement and verifies that correct safe tools and equipment are available and being used? This means regular inspections.
- 6) Have supervisors conducted regular Safety Observations? Where necessary, has counseling and enforcement been conducted? Most accidents are the result of repeated unsafe behavior that goes unnoticed. Observations can identify this behavior and corrective action can be taken to correct this.
- 7) Was the employee following the safe procedures as outlined? If the first six steps are in place then the only way the accident could of happened is for the employee to deviate from the proper procedure. If this is the case, what interfered with the employee following the safe work procedure?

Each step in this sequence needs to be outlined carefully and corrective action required outlined for each if necessary. Those involved in correcting each area should be identified and a completion time table should be established. Once this has been done, all employees involved in the activities that caused the accident should be retrained and the training documented.

When I applied the above seven steps to the accident on the construction site mentioned earlier, the following deficiencies were identified:

- 1) There was not a detailed written Fall Protection Plan on the site.
- 2) There were not any specific safety procedures in place for the particular activities the employee was performing.
- 3) There was some training on general Fall Protection requirements but this had not been done recently.
- 4) There was no documentation of training available for the particular procedures the employee was performing.
- 5) The employee was wearing a harness but was not tied off anywhere.
- 6) The site superintendent had not done any observations in this area to determine if this employee was working safely.
- 7) The employee was not following safe work practices because he was new on the site and these were not covered with him in detail before the accident.

If you need any help with your Safety Program or have questions, please call me at any time at 1-800-356-1274.