

Employee Injury Investigations – What is the Purpose?



When a staff member is injured while conducting their job duties, it is often a very unsettling experience. They may be in pain; medical treatment may be necessary; they may need to miss work; and may have to deal with the insurance company, etc. In any case, the incident should be investigated.

Let us take a step back and explore the incident investigation process to get a better understanding of why an injury or incident review is not only necessary, but also beneficial. The safety coordinator should interview the injured staff member and any witnesses, and examine the workplace for factors which might have contributed to the incident such as a broken ladder rung which contributed to a fall, a wet area on a floor due to a leaking pipe, etc. Once the cause of the accident has been determined and corrective actions have been made, the safety coordinator should record their findings and the actions taken. All staff members potentially benefit from a thoughtful and thoroughly completed incident investigation. First, to be clear, it is not an investigation of the injured worker, but rather an investigation of the conditions, procedures, processes, and equipment (or lack thereof) which resulted in a worker being injured. Second, the investigation is a requirement of the practice's Illness and Injury Prevention Plan, which is required by the state of California.

The process is focused on the circumstances that resulted in the injury, but what is the purpose? There are many. It is a fact-finding mission and not a fault-finding mission, with the primary purpose of determining the root cause of the incident. Even though the injured staff member will

be asked many questions, they are all asked in the spirit of fleshing out the root cause of the incident. All incidents have causes or reasons for happening. Even if a shortcut was taken to a prescribed procedure, there is still a reason the shortcut was taken. In many cases, there is more than one root cause and multiple contributing factors.

The secondary purpose, which is equally important, is to arrive at corrective actions that will prevent, or at least lessen, the possibility of the incident recurring. In other words, the process contributes to a safer environment. Additional purposes and benefits of the investigation process include the following:

- Help to identify and eliminate other hazards
- Help to identify and correct missing procedures, processes, and controls
- Provide an opportunity to improve the training process
- Provide an opportunity for management and staff to work collaboratively
- Foster a continuous improvement atmosphere and strong safety culture
- Give staff members an opportunity to recommend corrective actions

In conclusion, full participation and viewing this as a positive process, can lead to continuous safety improvement in the workplace.

Information provided by Preferred Employers Insurance, a Berkley Company.