

Accident Investigation November 2008

How to investigate accidents

Accident investigations are intended to identify accident root-causes and to determine any action necessary to prevent recurrence. Effective action is normally dependent on a thorough investigation. Management as well as employee action/inaction should be considered. The following investigation procedures are suggested:

1. Approach the investigation with an attitude of determining the facts, not blame.
2. Be objective. Do not jump to conclusions. The apparent cause may not be the actual cause.
3. Investigate immediately. Elapsed time may alter the conditions and peoples memories pertaining to the accident.
4. Go to the scene and inspect all physical evidence.
5. Talk to all involved persons and witnesses. Interview each person separately so you hear each version of the events, not a group re-enactment of the accident.
6. Don't make any assumptions on the cause (s) of the accident until you have gathered all the facts.

Multiple Causes of Accidents

There are several theories on what causes or leads to accidents and each theory has its own merits. However, if you look deeper into accident cause(s) you'll see that most accident was a result of a series of factors that all lined up and resulted in the unfortunate circumstance, an accident. This theory is commonly referred to as the "Domino Theory". Utilizing this theory, if you remove or place a barrier between dominos you have in effect broken the chain of events which lead to the injury/accident. The primary dominos are:

1. Lack of Control
2. Personal Factors
3. Substandard Acts or Practices

Here are more items to investigate with each domino:

1. Lack of Control
 - a. Training
 - b. Planned Inspections
 - c. Thorough accident investigations with corrective action taken
 - d. Safety rules and procedures
 - e. Hiring & placement
2. Personal Factors
 - a. Poor placement of employee in job not equipped to handle
 - b. Lack of knowledge
 - c. Lack of skill
 - d. Improper motivation
3. Substandard Acts or Practices
 - a. Operating without authority
 - b. Failure to warn
 - c. Failure to secure
 - d. Driving at improper speed
 - e. Using equipment improperly
 - f. Failure to wear PPE
 - g. Improper lifting



The following are questions to assist in determining why management or employee failure occurred:

1. Was the proper procedure being used? Were there any extenuating circumstances?

2. What is the employee's attitude to the job? Does the employee normally follow proper procedures and good safety practices?
3. Is the employee new to the company or new to the job?
4. What on-the-job training did the employee receive?
5. Was the employee informed of all the hazards associated with the job?
6. Are there department safety rules that are applicable to the employee's job? Does the employee know what they are?

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