Establishing an Incident Investigation Program: Focus On

Introduction

When a serious incident happens in the workplace, everyone will be busy dealing with the emergency. Helping injured victims, assessing if the danger has abated, trying to piece together what happened. So, it's critical to be prepared to investigate an incident before one occurs.

All incidents – regardless of size or impact – need to be investigated, including near misses. The time spent, and the detail involved will vary depending on how complex the incident is. Learn more in our Focus On: How to Conduct Meaningful Incident Investigations.

Written Plan

An incident investigation program should include a clearly stated, easy-to-follow written plan to include guidelines for:

- How and when management is to be notified of the incident.
- Notifying safety regulators according to incident reporting requirements. For example:
    - All work-related fatalities within 8 hours.
    - All work-related inpatient hospitalizations, all amputations, and all losses of an eye within 24 hours.
    - Who is authorized to notify outside agencies (i.e., fire, police, etc.).
    - Who will conduct investigations and what training they should have received.
    - Timetables for completing the investigation and developing/implementing recommendations.
    - Who will receive investigation recommendations.
    - Who will be responsible for implementing corrective actions.

Investigative Team

The most effective investigations are conducted by a team in which managers and employees work together. Each bringing in a different perspective, understanding and knowledge. Working together will also encourage all parties to "own" the conclusions and recommendations and to jointly ensure corrective actions are executed in a timely manner.

Where the incident involves a multi-employer worksite, the investigation should be shared with each employer at the site. Where the incident involves a temporary worker provided by a staffing agency, both the staffing agency and the host employer should conduct an incident investigation. It is a fundamental principal that temporary workers are entitled to the same protections under safety regulations as all other covered workers.

So, if a temporary worker is injured and the host employer knows about it, the staffing agency should be informed promptly. Likewise, if a staffing agency learns of an injury, it should inform the host employer promptly so future injuries might be prevented, and the case is recorded appropriately. Both the host employer and staffing agency should track and where possible, investigate the cause of workplace injuries.

Investigations are designed to focus on identifying root causes, not establishing fault. Identifying and correcting root causes should always be the key objective. Implementing an incident investigation program, training investigative teams, and conducting a meaningful Incident Investigation will help you reduce incident and injury rates, the time spent, the costs incurred, and other losses associated with incidents.