Incident Investigations Stats & Facts



DID YOU KNOW?

As an employer, you are responsible for providing a workplace that is safe, both physically and psychologically, for all of your employees. If you don’t do your best to prevent risks to their physical and mental health, you are contributing to a potentially toxic work environment.

Not only will this make employees unhappy working for you, it could lead to a lawsuit. Workplace incident investigations that are inadequate or never performed at all may lead to reputation damage or thousands of dollars in legal fees should the affected employee take legal action.

For instance, when an Amazon warehouse worker hurt her back on the job, her employer took 9 months to replace missing safety equipment that had resulted in her injury twice. As a result of having to take unpaid leave and losing her workers compensation benefits, the employee lost her home, forcing her to file a lawsuit.

Fifty per cent of businesses that face a major negative incident fail within two years of the crisis. Thorough workplace incident investigations can also prove that you are compliant with Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), discrimination laws and other regulations, which can protect your organization during a lawsuit.

The primary groups of accidents and incidents to be reported monthly by railroads are:

- Highway-rail grade crossing accidents/incidents.
- Rail equipment accidents/incidents.
- Casualties to persons (i.e., death and non-fatal injuries to all types of persons, and occupational illnesses involving railroad employees).

In addition to monthly railroad-reported accidents and incidents, railroads are required to provide FRA with immediate notification of various types of accidents. This notification is routed through the National Response Center, which notifies FRA of such accidents on a 24-hour, 7-day-a-week basis.

See definitions and requirements for reporting and/or recordkeeping in 49 CFR Part 225 and FRA’s Guide for Preparing Accident Incident Reports.

FRA Accident Investigations (general criteria)

FRA investigates accidents and incidents as determined by the Accident Analysis

Branch or regional management. Generally, FRA investigates accidents and incidents meeting the following criteria:

- Any collision (main or yard track), derailment, or passenger train incident resulting in at least one fatality or serious injury to railroad passengers or crewmembers.
- Any railroad-related accident resulting in death to an on-duty railroad employee, including an employee of a contractor to a railroad, regardless of craft.
- Any highway-rail grade crossing accident resulting in any of the following:
    - Death to one or more persons being transported in a commercial vehicle or school bus.
    - Serious injury to several persons being transported in a commercial vehicle or school bus.
    - Death to three or more persons in a private highway vehicle.
    - Accidents involving grade crossing signal failure or allegations of grade crossing signal failure.
- Any non-casualty train accident resulting in derailment of a locomotive, 15 cars or more, and extensive property damage.
- Any train accident/incident resulting in a fire, explosion, evacuation, or release of regulated hazardous materials, especially if it exposed a community to these hazards or the threat of such exposure.
- Any accident/incident involving a train transporting nuclear materials.
- Any train incident involving runaway or rollaway equipment, with or without locomotives.
- Any collision involving maintenance-of-way or hi-rail equipment.
- Any accident caused by failure of a locomotive or any part of a locomotive, or a person coming in contact with an electrically energized part that resulted in serious injury or death of one or more persons.
- Accidents resulting from signal failure including Positive Train Control-related failures and malfunctions.
- Any other train accident/incident likely to generate considerable public interest.
- Most Amtrak accidents/incidents.

Investigating a worksite incident- a fatality, injury, illness, or close call- provides employers and workers the opportunity to identify hazards in their operations and shortcomings in their safety and health programs. Most importantly, it enables employers and workers to identify and implement the corrective actions necessary to prevent future incidents.

Incident investigations that focus on identifying and correcting root causes, not on finding fault or blame, also improve workplace morale and increase productivity, by demonstrating an employer’s commitment to a safe and healthful workplace.

Incident investigations are often conducted by a supervisor, but to be most effective, these investigations should include managers and employees working together, since each bring different knowledge, understanding and perspectives to the investigation.

In conducting an incident investigation, the team must look beyond the immediate causes of an incident. It is far too easy, and often misleading, to conclude that carelessness or failure to follow a procedure alone was the cause of an incident. To do so fails to discover the underlying or root causes of the incident, and therefore fails to identify the systemic changes and measures needed to prevent future incidents. When a shortcoming is identified, it is important to ask why it existed and why it was not previously addressed.

Finally, investigating workplace incidents helps you find the root cause. Not only does this help you eliminate whatever led to the incident, it can also help you avoid recurring issues. For example, if an employee was injured by a falling box, an investigation may show that boxes are stacked too high and could harm someone else if conditions aren’t changed.