

“ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION”

Accident and incident investigation should be an integral part of every healthcare safety management program. Effective accident investigation prevents accidents from recurring, improves health and safety management, fulfills legal requirements, determines the cost of an accident, complies with applicable safety regulations, and facilitates Workers' Compensation claims management.

An accident is any unplanned, undesired event that results in personal injury or illness, property damage, environmental harm, or disruption of a normal activity. Accidents are usually complex and are caused by one or more hazardous (unsafe) acts and/or conditions.

Regardless of the outcome and the severity of any injury or illness that may or may not have occurred, all accidents and near misses should be reported, documented, investigated, and mitigated. All hospitals should have organized accident investigation systems in place as an effective means of identifying injury and illness trends, identifying underlying or basic (root) causes, and implementing cost-effective solutions.

When accidents and near misses are not reported, they are not investigated, and consequently, the causes are never determined and eliminated. Lack of training and education can leave employees ignorant of the importance of reporting accidents. Other reasons employees may choose not to report an accident or actively participate in an accident investigation include, fear, possibility of record spoiling or repercussions, embarrassment, ignorance and red tape.

Department supervisors should be trained to perform accident investigations. This should include reviewing subsequent reports, developing recommendations for corrective actions, and supplying health, safety and security compliance and technical expertise throughout the process. They should also assist in information gathering and witness interviews. Supervisors should be called upon to perform the investigations because they are more familiar with employees, the everyday work environment, work processes, equipment, materials, and procedures and can therefore communicate more effectively with workers. Supervisors also tend to have a vested interest in maintaining a safe and healthy workplace and are better equipped to take remedial action when a problem occurs. However, all levels of management must clearly demonstrate their support of the investigation process by reviewing reports and offering constructive criticism, assistance, and resources to produce a positive change.

Accident investigations not only determine what happened, but also how and why. The information gained from investigations can prevent the recurrence of similar or worse accidents and reduce associated Workers' Compensation costs. The primary objective of a workplace accident investigation should be to determine the basic or root cause of the accident so as to prevent reoccurrence.

Steps in an Accident Investigation

After being notified that an accident has occurred, the supervisor must promptly initiate steps to complete a safe, accurate, and thorough investigation. In the event of an injury or illness, two primary concerns must be dealt with before a formal investigation can proceed. The care and treatment of injured employees or patients, and eliminating or controlling a hazardous conditions takes precedence and should proceed as soon as qualified personnel are on-site.

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MHA PUBLIC AND PRIVATE WORKERS' COMPENSATION GROUPS MISSION

To provide workers' compensation products and services that meet the needs of the members of the Mississippi Hospital Association. This is accomplished through experienced workers' compensation professionals that specialize in health care.

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Next, you need to secure the physical evidence. This includes the condition of the work environment, equipment, and materials, as well as the position of injured employees, patients, and/or visitors at the time of the occurrence. Although physical evidence is usually the most noncontroversial information, it is susceptible to corruption and therefore must be documented as soon as possible.

Interviewing witnesses is the next step in an investigation. Anyone involved in the accident and individuals who saw the event happen are considered witnesses. Witnesses should be interviewed and should describe the incident in their own words. Interviewing witnesses is extremely important and should be conducted immediately after the site is secured, the injured treated, and /or any hazardous conditions mitigated. Witnesses will produce the most accurate accounts immediately after the incident, before the passage of time and exposure to the versions of others cloud their memory.

The next step is to perform a root cause analysis. This is a simple, sensible, and effective method that allows understanding of safety system problems by analyzing the cause-and-effect chain of events that led to a particular accident. By working backward from the accident through the direct cause and each indirect cause, investigators can identify underlying basic or root causes and then carefully analyze them as potential contributors to the incident. Indirect causes will usually be attributed to one or more of the following:

- Equipment -related error (mechanical failure, defective equipment)
- Material handling or repetitive-motion activities (improper lifting practices, twisting motions, unsafe posture)
- Behavioral causes (disregard of safety rules, failure to follow instructions)
- Conditions related to the work area (wet/slippery floors, weather conditions)
- Causes inherent to the task performed
- Causes inherent to the individual (preexisting medical condition, not physically fit)

Once the indirect causes are identified, each cause is further analyzed by reexamining the cause-and-effect chain until a basic or root cause is identified. Deficiencies in the following key areas should be considered:

- Training
- Inspections/audits/drills
- Policies and procedures
- Employee safety observations

All accidents are important. To get the most constructive use of data garnered during accident investigation supervisors should:

- Avoid blaming employees
- Secure management support for all investigations and corrective action processes.
- Develop a standardized investigation process that includes training supervisors to conduct prompt, thorough investigations and educating all employees on the theory of accident causation and the

importance of and processes for reporting all accidents

- Consult risk management, human resources and legal counsel when developing policies on site investigation, evidence preservation, interviewing, and report writing.
- Use root cause analysis methods to effectively and efficiently identify all basic causes and corresponding corrective actions

For additional information on accident investigation you may go to the website at ECRI, www.ecri.org or contact Robin Weltens at MHA Solutions. Also available are an Accident Investigation and Analysis Report and a root cause worksheet.

MHA Private and Public Groups Workers' Compensation Renewal Process

It's time again to begin the renewal process for your hospital's workers' compensation coverage which expires July 1, 2007. We will be sending the renewal questionnaire around the first of March via e-mail. It is imperative that we receive the completed form no later than April 4, 2007 as we are hoping to have all renewal quotes prepared and delivered during the month of May 2007. We appreciate your continued participation in these programs. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call Steve Weeks, Lisa Noble, or Angela Dear @ 1-800-234-8847.

C O N T A C T

DIRECTOR OF LOSS CONTROL

Robin Weltens
rweltens@hpico.com

SUPERVISOR OF WORKERS COMPENSATION

Diann Stogsdill
dstogsdill@hpico.com

MARKETING

Steven D. Weeks, Director
sweeks@hpico.com

Lisa H. Noble, CIC, Account Executive
lnoble@hpico.com



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