

# *Catholic Mutual. . ."CARES"*

## **INCIDENT INVESTIGATION**

Incident investigation, without question, is one of the most valuable methods of controlling losses. Each incident must be considered a total loss unless its true cause is objectively determined and all contributing deficiencies are corrected.

An incident investigation should be viewed as an integral part of the total safety program. Incident investigation is especially important as a means to determine cause, uncover indirect incident causes, prevent similar incidents from occurring, document facts, provide information on costs, and promote safety.

Thorough investigation, reporting, recording, and corrective follow-up of each incident can be time consuming. However, putting forth the necessary time and effort to prevent the reoccurrence of each incident is one of the most worthwhile investments that can be made.

### **What is an Incident?**

An incident is an unplanned event that interrupts something and normally results in the loss of time, property damage, and/or bodily injury.

### **What is an Incident Investigation?**

An incident investigation is an analysis and an account of an incident based on factual information gathered by a thorough and conscientious examination of all factors involved. An incident investigation is not a mere repetition of the individual incident itself, it is an objective evaluation of all facts, opinions, statements, and related information.

### **Which Incidents Should be Investigated?**

1. All incidents that result in serious injury or might have resulted in serious injury should be investigated.
2. All incidents that result in a minor injury that could have been a more serious injury should be investigated.
3. All incidents that result in property damage or some other material damage should be investigated.

4. Near-miss situations or those incidents without injury or property damage, but have the potential to be a serious problem should be investigated.

Every incident should be properly investigated, bearing in mind the following order of importance of resulting injuries:

- a. Deaths, or other catastrophic losses
- b. Permanent disabilities
- c. Temporary disabilities
- d. Non-disabling incidents

### **When Should Incident Investigations be Made?**

Incident investigation should be made as soon as possible after an incident has taken place. Even the smallest delay can allow information or items of importance to be removed, destroyed, or forgotten. A prompt investigation of any incident is quite beneficial in that it shows our concern about the incident; it allows fresh and accurate information to be gathered; and it leads to quick results in the prevention of future mishaps.

### **How Do We Conduct an Incident Investigation?**

Each incident should be investigated by the supervisory personnel, management personnel, or other individuals or committees that has been given the responsibility to complete this type of activity. The following list of procedures should be adhered to as closely as possible:

1. Examine the scene:
  - a. Investigate the incident location.
  - b. Reconstruct the chain of events leading up to the incident and attempt to determine the cause(s).
  - c. Draw a diagram of the location if it will be helpful in arriving at a conclusion.
  - d. Obtain the names of any witnesses and their location at the time of the incident.

2. Document:
  - a. Make notes concerning all pertinent facts.
  - b. Write down any procedures used, the misuse of any equipment or material, or other factors not in accordance with safety policy rules and regulations.
  - c. Note any unsafe conditions in the area such as defective items, faulty equipment, etc.
  - d. Note all other factors such as the time of the incident, the lighting conditions, the weather conditions, or any other factors that may have a relevant bearing on the incident.
3. Collect the evidence:
  - a. If an incident occurs due to a structural failure or equipment/machinery defect, it is essential to determine what failed and why, and what was defective and why.
4. Interview witnesses:
  - a. It is extremely important to interview witnesses as soon as possible. All relevant information should be put down in writing for future reference.
5. Interview victim:
  - a. Timing is important. If the incident/injury is minor, the interview should be made as soon as the investigation of the scene is complete.
  - b. If the incident/injury is serious, selecting the right time is a judgment factor. Immediately afterward, the victim may be confused and inaccurate; waiting too long may cause them to be cautious and evasive. Let the individual tell their story as they wish, without actual interrogation. The interview must be comprehensive.
6. Weigh the evidence:
  - a. It is necessary to attempt to eliminate any inconsistencies in the testimony of the injured party or the witness involved. However, under no circumstances should any attempt be made to judge the validity of any statements or assertions of fact.

During the information gathering process, we must draw upon all available sources to obtain as much pertinent data about the particular incident as possible. Throughout this process, we must know what questions to ask and continually ask those questions.

In the final analysis, we must be able to ask the six key questions that follow:

- Who was involved?
- What took place?
- When did it occur?
- Where did it happen?
- Why did it happen?
- How did it happen?

### **Has Corrective Action Been Taken?**

After an incident investigation has been completed, we must ask ourselves if we have done everything possible to prevent recurrence of this particular incident. We must follow through on any suggestions that have come about as a direct result of the incident investigation. Without question, the most thorough incident investigation is unproductive if it does nothing to prevent future incidents. Implementation of a corrective plan of action is the true measure of success of a results-oriented incident investigation process.

### **Principles Which Should Be Observed**

1. **Use common sense** - Stick to the facts and weigh their value to reach justified conclusions.
2. **Investigate each clue** - An apparently reasonable conclusion will often be changed by exploring factors which may not appear to be important.
3. **Check for unsafe conditions and acts** - Both of these are involved in the great majority of incidents that take place.
4. **Investigate all incidents** - Chance is often the sole difference between a trivial incident and a serious one. Results cannot be predicted.
5. **Make recommendations** - No investigation is complete unless corrective action is suggested.
6. **Prepare report** - Written reports are helpful tools for study and analysis to determine specific areas of operations where incidents are occurring and for follow-up action on recommendations.