SECTION E - GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING INVESTIGATIONS

Accidents do not just happen. They are caused and, if these causes aren't eliminated, the accidents will happen again. Most accidents have root causes, which need to be identified to determine:

1) What happened,
2) Why it happened, and
3) How to prevent it from happening again.

Thoroughly gathering and examining information about the accident or incident and its cause(s) will help:

- Prevent future accidents;
- Identify and correct/eliminate unsafe conditions, acts or procedures;
- Reduce costs and down time; and
- Assist in the processing of Worker's Compensation claims.

All accidents, including those occurring to volunteers or citizens, should be investigated by the supervisor who has knowledge of work processes, procedures, and persons in the workplace environment where the incident occurred. Incidents may not cause injury or damage, but should be investigated as thoroughly as compared to an accident resulting in injury or property damage.

When an employee is injured or causes any damage, the employee should immediately contact a supervisor in order to correctly relay the necessary information for proper documentation. The employee's statement provides a basis for determining the facts of the incident.

Investigative Process

After acquiring necessary medical aid for injured persons, supervisors should follow these steps for investigating accidents. This list should be used only as a guide and may not be all-inclusive for every department.

A. Investigate the scene as soon as practicable after the accident/incident noting conditions and the location of equipment, physical objects, and witnesses. Make notes, take pictures, and draw sketches as needed.

B. Interview witnesses soon after the accident so the facts will be fresh in their minds. Be certain they understand that no blame is being placed and that you are simply trying to gather facts to prevent a recurrence.

C. Interview the involved parties when the timing is right.

   1. Keep in mind their physical and emotional condition.

   2. Ask them to describe what happened. Use open-ended questions to obtain detail.

   3. Do not fix blame or find fault; just get the facts.

   4. Ask the employee his or her opinion about how the accident could be prevented in the future.

D. Take steps or make recommendations to prevent similar occurrences.

   1. Expressions such as "employee was careless" have no place in a factual report.

E. Complete ***Supervisor's Accident/Incident Investigation Report*** [Appendix I, Form 3].

F. If the police were called, attach a copy of the police report to the ***Supervisor's Accident/ Incident Investigation Report*** [Appendix I, Form 3]. This is most common for vehicle accidents.

G. Most accidents occur because of a combination of an unsafe act and an unsafe physical condition. Look for both, then draw a conclusion as to why the unsafe act was committed or why the condition existed.

H. Once an accident occurs, immediate action must be taken to prevent a recurrence. Indicate what needs to be done and who is going to do it.

I. During the accident investigation, many questions must be answered. Because of the infinite number of accident-producing situations, contributing factors, and causes, it is impossible to list all questions that may apply to all investigations.

Suggested Questions

The following questions are generally applicable and will be considered in most accident investigations. Typically, these questions should ask about the situation: who, what, when, where, why, and how.

A. What was the injured person(s) doing at the time of the accident? Were they performing assigned tasks? Assisting other people?

B. What were other persons doing at the time of the accident?

C. Was the proper equipment being used for the task? What was the condition of the equipment? Was it being worn or used properly?

D. Is the process, operation, or task new?

E. Were people properly supervised and trained?

F. What was the location of the accident? What was the physical condition of the area when the accident occurred?

G. What permanent action could have prevented the accident or minimized its effects?

H. What action is now being recommended?