



CHRIS JONES RISK MANAGEMENT

How would you investigate an accident in your workplace?

By Chris Jones, Chris Jones Risk Management

The saying “Those who do not learn from their history are doomed to relive it.” has been attributed to many great minds. When it comes to accidents and injuries, it is definitely true.

Many organisations have the same kind of accidents over and over again. This is often due to a fatalistic view that nothing can be done. This is a self fulfilling prophecy. I have seldom investigated an accident without finding at least something that would have prevented, or at least reduced the likelihood, of the incident occurring again.

All compensable injuries should be investigated. The investigation should be documented using an incident investigation report form.

The investigation should be conducted by line management and reviewed by senior management and employee OHS representatives.

Use the following steps when investigating an employee injury:

Make the area safe

The last thing we want to do is injure anyone conducting the investigation. Ensure any life safety and first aid actions have been undertaken. Isolate and tag out any moving plant, and tape off the area. You may have statutory obligations for

reporting the incident, and ensuring that there is no tampering with the evidence.

Establish who, what, where & when

Establish a time line of events. Get the names of all participants and witnesses.

Conduct a thorough inspection of the area

It is extremely valuable to take photos of the area for later reference. The availability of digital cameras means we can take as many photos as we like, and get prints as quickly as needed.



Conduct thorough interviews of all involved

Conduct the interviews in a quiet area where privacy can be guaranteed, however, it may be necessary to take the witness back to the scene of the accident to “walk through” what happened.

Avoid leading questions. Try to ask open ended questions. “What did you do next?” is preferable to “Did you press the button?”

Review existing risk assessments and safe work procedures

You ought to have risk assessments and safe work procedures in place for all high risk manual handling tasks, plant, and



CHRIS JONES RISK MANAGEMENT

hazardous substance. Take the opportunity to review these procedures and risk assessments.

Did we have a risk assessment and safe work procedure in place for this risk? If not, then there may be other serious risks that we've missed. On the other hand, there may be a well established safe work procedure in place, that was not followed. This may be due to a lack of training, or it may indicate a need to counsel and discipline those who did not follow these procedures.

Closely review other systems and documentation that may be relevant to the accident, including training records, maintenance procedures, and hazard inspections checklists.



Identify the causes

At this stage you will have as much information as is likely to be available. There is frequently more than one cause; but if we are interested in prevention, the important thing is to formulate actions that will control all possible causes of future accidents.

Establish appropriate controls

Remember the hierarchy of controls. Eliminating the risk altogether, or

engineering controls, are going to be more effective than procedures or personal protective equipment. Establish a clear action plan to implement all the controls required, and then monitor implementation & results. Without effective implementation and follow up, the accident investigation will have been a waste of time.

It is not enough to learn the lessons of history, we must act upon them.

Chris Jones Risk Management provides a wide range of Occupational Health and Safety services and training, including:

- ✓ OHS Audits – SafetyPlan; SafetyPlan Gold; AS 4801
- ✓ OHS programme implementation
- ✓ Risk Assessments
- ✓ OHS culture surveys
- ✓ Accredited training for construction induction and consultation (NSW)
- ✓ OHS training for management and supervisors

Disclaimer

The advice and information contained in this document are offered solely to provide general information. No representation or warranty expressed or implied as to the accuracy or completeness is made and no responsibility is accepted for incidental, consequential or special damages arising out of the use of all or part of the information contained in this document.