



Health & Safety Newsletter

Recognition, Evaluation & Control

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Accident Investigation

A program for investigation and finding the root causes of accidents is an essential component of a company's health and safety program. Accidents don't just happen. By evaluating and studying the factors leading up to the accident, controls can be implemented to prevent the accident from happening again.

There are three main reasons why accidents should be investigated. Accident investigation demonstrates the company's genuine concern for employees and their well being. It also eliminates unsafe acts and conditions that could lead to similar

accidents in the future and it makes business sense by reducing costs associated with Worker's Compensation, property damage and lost productivity.



Studies of accidents show that there are many near miss incidents that occur where no-one is injured or property is damaged for every case resulting in an injury or damage. A good accident investigation program includes documentation of these near miss incidents as well as accidents resulting in injury or property damage. By eliminating the near miss incidents the more severe accidents will be eliminated as well.

Management should develop a written accident investigation program outlining the goals for the program, responsibilities of employees and management and the procedures for conducting the investigations. The policy should require employees to report accidents and incidents immediately. Supervisor responsibilities should include:

- Get prompt medical attention for injured employees.
- Contact safety or management personal when a major accident or high loss potential incident occurs.

- Complete an accident investigation.

Supervisors should have the primary responsibility for completing the investigations because they know the most about the situation and the employees who may be involved. They also will have primary responsibility for implementing the controls that result from the investigation. An accident investigation form should be developed that simplifies the gathering of facts and provides for the corrective action plan to prevent recurrence.

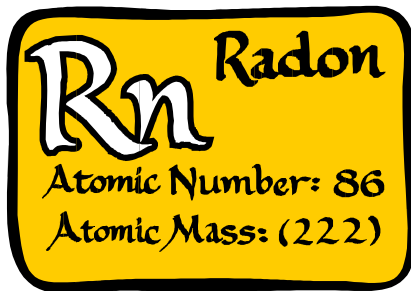
It is important to conduct the investigation as soon as possible. Interview employees who may have been involved or witnessed the event. Conduct the interviews at the scene of the accident if possible but make sure the interviews are as private as possible. Remember that accident investigation is a fact finding process. Do not make judgments or judgmental remarks. Records should be made that include photos, diagrams and written descriptions.

After the accident investigation has been conducted, identification of the potential causes and development of an action plan to eliminate these causes will prevent the same types of accidents from happening again. The supervisor who completed the investigation, safety personal, management representatives and groups such as the safety committee should participate in this problem solving process. Conclusions should be developed based on the facts and

recommendations made to correct deficiencies. Each recommendation should include an action plan for implementation identifying who is responsible and the time frame for completion.

Radon

Radon is a naturally occurring gas found in many buildings that can cause lung cancer. Proper risk assessment and evaluation of radon will minimize potential exposure.



According to a study by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), exposure to radon causes 15,000 to 22,000 lung cancer deaths in the United States each year and is responsible for 12% of lung cancer deaths. This makes radon the second leading cause of lung cancer after smoking. Radon is formed by the natural radioactive decay of uranium in the earth. Uranium is present at low levels in bedrock in many areas as well as deposits left by glaciers. Since radon is a gas, it passes through cracks and faults to the earth's surface. Radon passes through cracks and holes in building foundations where it collects in basements and areas with limited ventilation. Radon can't be seen and is odorless and tasteless so it can only be detected by special sampling methods.

The potential for radon varies widely across the country depending on the bedrock and soil type. According to the EPA, nearly 1 out of every 15 homes has radon levels above the

recommended level. Radon collects in the lowest levels of building with basements and underground areas posing the highest risk. Since one of the components of exposure to any hazardous substance is the duration of exposure, persons who spend large amounts of time in these underground areas have the greatest risk. Basement bedrooms and office areas are a particular concern since persons spend large amounts of time in these areas.

The EPA action level for radon is 4 pCi/L (picocuries per liter) of air. A picocuri is a measure of radioactive decay and is defined as 27 disintegrations per second. When levels are above this level, remediation should be done to reduce the exposure level.

The only way to find out if there is a radon problem is to do testing. Testing should be done in frequently used underground rooms and testing should be done during the cooler months of the year when buildings are more closed up. Additional testing requirements include:

- Select an area that will not be disturbed.
- The sampling areas should be closed up for 12 hours before sampling.
- Do not select areas near air handling equipment, fans, vents, door or windows.
- The sampling device should be 20 inches above the floor and 3 feet from doors and windows.

There are a wide variety of radon sampling methods. Some involve continuous monitors and others involve sample collection devices that must be sent to a laboratory for analysis. Test kits and laboratories can be found in each state by contacting the state radon contact. These are listed on EPA's radon

webpage at <http://www.epa.gov/radon/>.

EPA recommends that initial short-term tests be conducted for two to 90 days. If results are equal to or greater than 4 pCi/L, follow-up measurement is recommended. If the follow-up testing shows levels greater than 4 pCi/L, remedial action should be taken.

If remediation is needed, choose a qualified radon mitigation contractor. Start by checking with your state radon contact on the EPA webpage. Many states require radon professionals to be licensed, certified, or registered. Radon reduction systems can reduce radon levels by up to 99 percent. It is always a good idea to get an estimate from more than one qualified radon mitigation contractor.

Transitional Return-to-Work (TRTW)

The major components of traditional loss control programs are activities designed to prevent accidents and injuries. These include such things as establishing safety rules, conducting hazard analyses or safety inspections, conducting employee training as well as many other activities. These programs reduce Worker's Compensation costs up front. A good loss control program should also include activities design to minimize costs after an accident occurs and the most significant way to mitigate these losses is through a Transitional Return-to-Work (TRTW) Program.



In the past most injured employees remained off work until they were completely healed and capable of performing their normal job duties. Studies have shown that a prolonged absence from one's normal roles, including absence from the workplace, is detrimental to mental, physical and social well being. The longer the employee is off work, the more these stresses affect the employee physically and psychologically. This emotional distress results in increased numbers of medical procedures, rehab/therapy costs, and surgical expenses. Studies have also shown that the longer an employee is off work, the more likely that there will be litigation. Employees will typically contact an attorney about two weeks after an injury. Approximately 80% of claims involving litigation result in higher settlements. Lost time wages (indemnity losses) are also a significant component of total Worker's Compensation costs and losses in productivity also add to the employers cost.

To reduce costs to the employer as well and the adverse effects to the injured employee, it is critical that a TRTW Program be implemented.

Benefits to the employer include:

- Reduces worker's compensation costs.
- Enhances the company's image.
- Promotes employee morale.
- Reduces potential litigation.
- Decreases malingering.
- Decreases the potential for re-injury.
- Reduces loss of productivity.

Benefits to the employee include:

- Provides stability and security.
- Provides quicker recovery.
- Helps the injured employee maintain a positive self image.
- Minimizes negative financial impacts.
- Reduces the potential of re-injury.

The first step in developing a TRTW program is to formulate a written policy. The policy should emphasize the company's commitment to getting injured employees back to productive work as soon as possible, and a willingness to provide work that meets the employee's physical limitations.

Many injured employees have work restrictions depending on the nature of their injury. The company should develop lists of jobs that can be done if employees have restrictions such as lifting limits, sitting requirements or one hand limitations. The list of light duty jobs should be included in the program to facilitate quicker return to work. Along with this, it is vital to have written job descriptions which include physical job requirements. Also identify what is a critical job requirement. Perhaps a job can be modified if the injured employee's medical restrictions are not essential to the job.

Communications between the employer, insurance carrier and medical provider are critical to successful TRTW. Employers should establish a relationship with local medical providers to facilitate the TRTW process. Medical providers should be invited to the facility to become familiar with the operations and be provided with the company's TRTW program. Let the medical provider know that the company will accommodate all injured employee work restrictions.

The program should be communicated to all employees so they understand the medical management process in the event they are injured and their role in the TRTW program. Employee responsibilities include:

- Report an injury immediately to a supervisor.
- Complete all requested paperwork.

- Maintain contact with the employer.
- Provide regular updates on their health condition.
- Follow the treating physician's directions and treatments.
- Do not work beyond the medical work restrictions.

Supervisors play a critical role in the success of the program. They are the front line interface between the company and the employee while the employee is on work restrictions. Responsibilities of the supervisor include:

- Get the injured employee prompt medical attention.
- Perform an accident investigation.
- Visit the injured employee.
- Keep informed of the employee's progress.
- Make the returned employee feel welcome and glad to be back.
- Provide temporary modified duties approved by the doctor.
- Monitor the employee's work activities to ensure work restrictions are never exceeded.

Management should develop specific return-to-work plans for more difficulty cases. These plans help facilitate the employee returning to work by providing timelines and goals during the rehabilitation process.