



Incident Investigation: Preventing Reoccurrence

When a person in a workplace is hurt, all coworkers are impacted.

Investigating incidents so that risks leading to them can be addressed is one of the most important things safety programs should support. Effective incident investigations should start with the knowledge that:

- There are multiple contributing factors that led to the incident.
- Human error is a sign that the contributing factors exist, but is not the cause itself.

Incident investigation is most productive when people that know the most about how work is done are involved and bring their unique perspectives. Using a team approach is a proven method for understanding how risk can be reduced at its source.

The work of these teams benefits greatly from using a process that avoids jumping to conclusions by identifying contributing factors. Better understanding of what happened produces better ideas on preventing the situation that led to the incident.

Engaging people closest to the work that genuinely want to prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future can also influence effective decision making as work is carried out.

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5 million workers
are injured in the U.S. annually.¹



The **total annual cost** of the top 10 most-disabling workplace injuries is **\$61.88 billion.**²



Preventing a workplace injury can **save** businesses an estimated average of **\$39,000.**³

Root-Cause Analysis

Incident investigations are successful when they lead to understanding of the root causes.

This means going beyond just looking at who was involved and where it occurred, and examining **why the incident happened**.

One widely used root-cause analysis technique is the “Five-Whys” Analysis. It starts with stating what happened without suggesting fault or cause. This is followed by a sequence of “why” questions that do not suggest fault or failing of an individual.

If, for example, root causes of employee slips and falls in the work area are not

identified and acted upon, actions to prevent them may fall short. Using the “Five-Whys” Analysis can make understanding the risk at its source easier and provide more effective prevention. See a complete example of the “Five-Whys” Analysis in the following action:

Incident: *An employee slipped and fell at work.*

1. **Why?** Because the floor was slippery.
2. **Why?** Because there was a liquid on the floor.
3. **Why?** Because it was not cleaned up after the spill.
4. **Why?** Because there is no process outlined for spill detection and immediate clean-up procedures.



5. **Why?** Because general cleaning is done afterhours by a cleaning company.

In this simple example, the “Five-Whys” Analysis points to the need for processes to detect spills as they occur and clean them up immediately. When those steps are put in place, the risk of employee slips and falls will be reduced.

Complimentary Customer Training

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Takeaways

1. Incidents are rarely the fault of the worker.
2. There are multiple contributing factors to incidents.
3. Ask your manager how you can be involved in incident investigation.
4. Refer to Liberty Mutual reference note *Workers Compensation Incident Investigation Report*, RC 8128, for helpful tips and a template of what to include in your incident investigations. RC 8128 is available on Liberty Mutual SafetyNet.™

1. National Safety Council. (2017). *How to conduct an incident investigation*. Retrieved from <http://www.nsc.org>
2. *2016 liberty mutual workplace safety index*. Retrieved from <https://www.libertymutualgroup.com>
3. United States Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration. (Dec 2015). *Incident [accident] investigations: A guide for employers*. Retrieved from <https://www.osha.gov>

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