

TOOLBOX TALK #1

INCIDENT INVESTIGATIONS: GETTING STARTED

Workplace incidents should be actively investigated. The Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) points out that when incidents are investigated, “the emphasis should be concentrated on finding the root cause of the incident so you can prevent the event from happening again”.



Other reasons to investigate include fulfilling legal requirements, finding the cost of the incident and processing workers’ compensation claims.

According to CCOHS, the person or group investigating the incident should be experienced in investigation techniques, causation models, legal and organizational requirements, occupational health and safety fundamentals, and work procedures.

Steps to take

When a workplace incident occurs, time is of the essence. “As little time as possible should be lost between the moment of the incident and the beginning of the investigation,” CCOHS states. The investigation team should ask a number of questions, including:

- Were safe work procedures followed?
- Were the appropriate tools and materials available to work safely?
- Was the necessary personal protective equipment used or worn?
- Were workers properly trained?

In addition to these questions, look into the work environment. Was weather or poor housekeeping a contributing factor? Was it too hot or too cold? Did inadequate lighting play a role?

Then, look into personnel. CCOHS emphasizes that the purpose of the investigation is not to establish blame among workers. Find out the status of the involved employees’ health. Did fatigue play a role? Were they under a lot of stress?

Don’t forget to consider management. “Failures of management systems are often found to be direct or indirect causes,” CCOHS states. In addition, ask:

- Were safety rules communicated and understood by all employees?
- Were safe work procedures enforced?
- Were hazards previously identified and assessed?
- Were safety inspections regularly carried out?
- If an unsafe condition had been discovered, was corrective action taken?

Once the investigation is complete, come up with recommendations that are specific and constructive, and identify root causes and contributing factors, CCOHS states.