

Self Assessment Guide for an Effective Incident Investigation Process

Overview:

The incident investigation process is an essential part of a cooperative's safety program. Thorough incident investigations emphasize not only why and how the incident occurred but the underlying root causes of the incident. When participants are able to determine the root cause of an incident they will be able to implement specific corrective actions that prevent future reoccurrence of similar incidents. When incidents are investigated, the primary emphasis should be on fact finding and analysis that lead to meaningful actions, not to determine fault nor assign blame.

Many times the investigations will show human error as a primary cause of the incident. When this occurs these errors should be considered in the context of the whole safety system. A key question to ask is, were other underlying causes created in the system that encouraged or enabled the error to occur beyond the person? Many times the temptation is to stop the investigation at the level of identifying the responsible employee without considering the broader context of the system that allowed or created the situation in the first place. The purpose is to identify and prevent at-risk situations from reoccurring, not to find blame. Focusing on blame restricts meaningful follow-through actions from being taken.

Recommended corrective actions from an incident investigation should not include discipline for the employee(s) involved. The focus should be on identifying and documenting objective facts and finding the root cause of the incident. Any disciplinary steps should be administered outside the incident investigation process, within normal HR disciplinary procedures and guidelines.

Evaluation Matrix – Effective Incident Investigation Process

Evaluation	#	Attributes
	1	Clear definitions are in place that defines relevant terms, such as accident, incident, near miss, reportable item, unsafe condition, hazards, injury, and other terms that describe an unsafe event or situation.
	2	Incident investigation procedures are written and understood, including what gets investigated; who is involved; when investigation occurs; roles and responsibilities; and how the process works.
	3	The incident investigation process emphasizes fact finding and root cause analysis.
		A guiding principle of the incident investigation process is all incidents are preventable rather than blame focused.
	4	Incident investigation processes and procedures are periodically reviewed, updated, and refined for effectiveness.
	5	Incident investigation results include workable corrective actions that enable prevention of similar types of incidents.
	6	An appropriate number of personnel are trained in all aspects of the incident investigation processes and methods
	7	Managers/supervisors are engaged in the incident investigation process
	8	An open and safe environment is provided that gains candid and objective input from impacted employees.
	9	Appropriate time and resources are provided for key personnel to participate in the process.
	10	Appropriate personnel participate in the investigation process (as required) including employees with knowledge of the work, safety professionals, safety committee members, union representatives (if applicable), “outside” experts, and front-line supervisors.
	11	A consistent approach is followed for root cause analysis and corrective action identification.
	12	A consistent approach is used to determine the appropriate type and level of investigation depending upon the nature and seriousness of the incident.
	13	Completed investigations consistently document what and how the incident occurred; sequence of events leading to the incident; contributing factors; and specific underlying root causes.
	14	The incident investigation form guides thorough documentation and analysis of the incident, including room for describing multiple causes, diagrams, pictures, police reports and other relevant attachments.

Evaluation Matrix – Effective Incident Investigation Process

Evaluation	#	Attributes
	15	Incidents and root causes from investigations are categorized by type, are tracked and analyzed for trends, and for identifying safety improvements.
	16	Investigation results include quantified costs and impacts (potential or actual) from incidents for loss control purposes.
	17	Incident investigation results are communicated and discussed with employees for lessons learned and to create understanding on any follow-up improvement actions.
	18	An established process is in place to review and approve corrective actions, and follow up on implementation of recommendations.

5 - Exceeds, 4 - Satisfies All, 3 - Satisfies Most, 2 - Partially Satisfies, 1 - Fails to Satisfy Requirements

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