

Investigate to Prevent: Safety Management Practices for Structural Movers



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It can happen in the blink of an eye, and lives can be changed forever. Unfortunately, unsafe or hazardous conditions may only be realized after an accident has occurred or someone has been injured. For the benefit of your employees, your customers and your business, you should conduct an accident investigation after each mishap. Regardless of whether or not an injury occurred or the structure being moved was damaged an accident investigation needs to take place. Knowing when to perform an accident investigation, the steps involved in completing it properly and the benefits that can result are vital to ensure that the same accident will not be repeated.

An unforeseen event may have happened to an employee or a structure that was being moved, but the knowledge gained from an accident investigation can help your company prevent future accidents. Investigating accidents can provide information on how to correct the actions that resulted in a loss. The goal of the investigation is to provide a safe working environment for all those involved with the moving process. This objective can be achieved by determining the root causes of accidents and the appropriate corrective measures needed to help prevent accidents in the future.

An accident investigation should be performed if employees, contractors, subcontractors, customers or the public are involved in the following scenarios related to a move:

- Injury, illness or property damage occurs
- "Near misses" occur

A "near miss" is a situation where no injury, illness or property damage has occurred, but similar conditions in the future may result in an accident. This time you were lucky, but you might not be as lucky next time. The difference between an accident and a near miss could simply be fractions of a second or a few inches.

Some common situations that would require an accident investigation are:

- Auto accidents
- Injury to someone on the jobsite (employee, subcontractor, structure owner)
- Excessive damage to structure/equipment being moved
- Any "near miss" that could lead to future losses

When an accident has occurred, accurate and timely information is a major factor in determining the events that resulted in the mishap. Therefore, the investigation should begin as soon as possible after the accident. Information that is gathered right after the accident will be clearer, more details will be remembered by those involved, and the conditions will be similar to those at the time of the accident. However, if medical treatment is needed, the investigation should be delayed to seek appropriate help for the injured parties. The investigation should be strictly based on facts and not place blame or fault.

Follow these steps when performing your own investigation:

1. Understand the need for investigation
2. Prepare for the investigation
3. Gather the facts about the accident
4. Analyze the facts
5. Develop conclusions
6. Analyze conclusions
7. Make a report
8. Make appropriate recommendations
9. Follow through with all recommendations
10. Follow-up on corrective actions

1. **Understand the need for investigation** - Near misses and accidents are an indication that an area of your operation may need improvement, the workplace could be made safer for employees and it could probably run more efficiently. Knowing the causes of accidents, and controlling them, will help reduce your company's losses.

2. **Prepare for the investigation** - When accidents do occur, they can be handled more efficiently if you prepare for them ahead of time. A plan must be in place for steps to be taken immediately after the accident, as well as for the following investigation. A supervisor should perform the investigation.

3. **Gather the facts** - Gathering the facts of the incident is the step that the actual investigation process starts (the first two steps should be completed prior to any accident occurring). It is best to take a systematic approach to the investigation, in knowing what facts need to be gathered, and how they will be recorded. Gather the facts about what happened, what factors allowed the accident to happen, and document witness statements.

4. **Analyze the facts** - Carefully document all facts gathered about the accident. Analyzing the facts will be on-going throughout the investigation, starting when the first facts are recorded. Analyze the statements of witnesses and their credibility, any inaccuracies between witnesses, and what the facts indicate about operating procedures.

5. **Develop conclusions** - In this stage, you can start to form conclusions about what happened and what actions, or inactions, caused the accident to happen. Document these conclusions, along with the facts they are based on. The gaps in the documentation may lead the investigation to other areas where more facts are needed, or where other conclusions can be drawn. The steps of gathering and analyzing the facts and developing conclusions may need to be repeated as new information becomes available.

6. **Analyze the conclusions** - This is a continuous step as more facts are gathered and additional conclusions are drawn. Examine and analyze all conclusions for their accuracy.

7. **Make a report** - The report should include all facts, analysis and conclusions. Organize the information specific to the incident, the people involved and the facts that have been reviewed and revised into a formal report. In the report, include a short description of the accident, and the essential details, which are supported by the facts that have been gathered and the necessary corrective actions.

8. **Make appropriate recommendations** - Identify the appropriate corrective actions to help prevent future accidents. State the specific recommendations outlining the exact procedures needed to correct the problem. Identify those responsible for

reviewing and implementing the corrective actions in your recommendations.

9. **Follow through on all recommendations** - Action must be taken to complete all recommendations, otherwise the chances of the accident reoccurring will remain the same. Inform all employees and those involved of the new procedures to be implemented and expect compliance. The old way may have been "easier," but the new procedures will help reduce loss.

10. **Follow-up on the corrective action** - Corrective actions should continue to be evaluated to prevent or reduce the occurrence of the accident happening again. Regularly review all recommendations to ensure strict and ongoing compliance.

Following this accident investigation procedure will help to prevent future accidents by investigating and analyzing their causes and implementing corrective actions to make the workplace safer during the moving process.

St. Paul Travelers offers materials in the form of exposure guides, technical bulletins, checklists and CD-ROMs on a variety of risk control topics, including accident investigation. The company also offers Safety Academy classes, which are free to its customers. For more information, visit: www.stpaultravelers.com/riskcontrol.

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