

BFAWU GUIDE TO ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

Detailed accident investigation should not be seen as a way of apportioning blame or as a way of gathering evidence for a punitive damages claim, but as a positive opportunity to improve health & safety standards in the workplace.

Our actions in gathering, recording, disseminating and acting on information may be the difference between a re-occurrence and possibly a more serious accident and the preventative measures that we are looking for. This is where an efficient, formal accident investigation plan comes into play.

An effective Accident Investigation system should contain the following-

- Clear guidelines on how to conduct the investigation, setting standards that are easy for all to follow. This will allow a consistent approach, irrespective of who does the investigation.

It is no good having standards of conduct that are only understood by the person who wrote them.

- A system that encourages sensible reporting of all accidents and near misses, no matter how trivial.

Most serious accidents are preceded by several minor ones or some near misses.

- The opportunity for management and union to jointly investigate all accidents as partners in risk management.
- A decision making process that can evaluate the actual or potential risk of re-occurrence.
- An effective system of dealing with the possible consequences, like first aid provisions and emergency services.

It is no use analysing the causes, if we cannot deal with the consequences.

- A review process that can evaluate the effectiveness of the investigation.

Following an accident or near miss Safety Reps' should:

- Gather the evidence including witness statements.
- Put the evidence into chronological order. (It will help to determine what happened)
- Use the decision making process to ensure that measures are taken to prevent re-occurrence.
- Report your findings to management, including your recommendations and any possible breaches of legislation. (Always document your evidence, it may be needed later)

Safety Representatives should also take into account the environment when conducting an investigation. E.g. is it cold, wet, humid, greasy, dark or untidy? Are there holes in the floor? Is there a lack of space?

They should also look at the risk assessment, previous problems and the levels of training given, as this will help with the final evaluation.

Last but by no means least, ensure that there is a system of reporting back to the workforce. There is nothing worse than being left in the dark for building mistrust. Sensible and coherent communications will help to encourage future participation by the workforce in accident investigation and a more realistic chance of eliminating future dangerous occurrences.