

Incident Investigations: Four Critical Stages

In a recent post to *On the Safe Side* (<http://peaksafetyperformance.com/blog>), Peak Safety Performance President David Lynn writes about the four critical stages of incident investigation. Here's a quick recap of the stages and key steps to consider within each.

Stage 1: Get Started

"Effective incident investigation programs encourage personnel to report all incidents, including first-aid injuries, recordable injuries and near-hits," Lynn explains. "When a workforce embraces the importance of reporting, it has an opportunity to correct small problems before they escalate to larger issues." Key steps at this stage include:

- Promote the importance of reporting all incidents (e.g., first aid, recordables and near-hits).
- Eliminate any punitive action for reporting.
- Establish time frames for how quickly workers should report incidents.

Stage 2: Conduct the Investigation

"An effective investigation involves more than filling out a report or checking boxes on a form. A paper exercise

does not facilitate long-term improvement," Lynn says. "The most successful investigation tool is the one that gains the full support of the company's leaders." At this stage, it is best to explore issues such as:

- why the action made sense to the employee;
- how training affected each step;
- communication, procedures and management/supervision.

Stage 3: Generate Corrective Actions

"The investigation phase will paint a storyboard that led to the incident," Lynn explains. "Each step in the storyboard represents an opportunity to change the outcome. Corrective actions should address elements of the storyboard that failed or contributed to the incident." Here are some key steps to consider when applying corrective actions.

- Address all appropriate elements on the storyboard with sustainable corrective actions.
- Define who is responsible for corrections.
- Track corrective actions on a log and include target dates for completion.

Stage 4: Communication Lessons Learned

Lynn notes that this stage is easy to overlook but should be a priority. "Great programs . . . communicate the lessons learned. . . . Leaders should tell others about the event to help ensure that a similar incident does not occur," he says. To make lessons learned memorable, Lynn offers these tips:

- Make the topic vivid with the story; share a personal example of how it applies to the audience.
 - Help people visualize the consequences. Share examples of related injuries and the impact such an event has on families.
 - Create triggers that will prompt people to think about the incident throughout the day.
 - Make workers imagine, think about and feel the impact of the incident.
- Lynn asserts that no incident should happen twice. "Put principle to practice and build an incident investigation process around the four pillars: report, investigate, correct and communicate," he says. "When organizations invest in a full circle process that focuses on the small things, they can turn a reactive process into a proactive tool."

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