

PRESENTER'S GUIDE

"ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION"

Part of the General Safety Series

OUTLINE OF MAJOR PROGRAM POINTS

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The following outline summarizes the major points of information presented in the program. The outline can be used to review the program before conducting a classroom session, as well as in preparing to lead a class discussion about the program.

- **We all know accidents happen, and we know that they can happen to anybody... including ourselves.**
 - That can mean pain, injury, sometimes even death.
 - It's important to understand why these incidents happen.
 - If we make each one a learning experience, we can prevent the same types of accidents from happening again.

- **An accident can be caused by hazardous conditions or unsafe work practices.**
 - But even when the reason seems obvious, the real "root cause" can often be something else.

- **That's where "accident investigation" comes in.**
 - It examines an incident systematically, to determine its true causes.
 - That information is then used to update policies, procedures or equipment to reduce the risk of that type of accident from ever occurring again.

- **The point of an accident investigation is not to "assign blame" or to get anyone in trouble.**
 - It's to prevent people from being injured in the same way in the future.

- **Before we discuss the "investigation", let's talk for a minute about how we should deal with incidents themselves.**
 - There are two types of workplace incidents, accidents and "near misses".

- **A "near miss" is an incident which under slightly different circumstances could have resulted in an injury or damage to equipment or materials.**
 - In other words, it's an "accident waiting to happen".
- **"Near misses" can warn us about a problem before something more serious happens.**
 - It's much better to learn from "near misses" than from accidents!
 - Unfortunately, we won't always have a "near miss" to warn us about a potential problem.
- **If an accident does occur, our first concern should be that the people who are injured are being cared for.**
 - If someone needs first aid and you're qualified to give it, that should come first.
 - Then medical personnel should be called immediately.
- **Once any victims are taken care of, the appropriate supervisors and managers should be notified if they aren't already at the scene.**
- **Then the area should be secured so that no one else can get hurt (safety tape is often used for this).**
 - This also helps prevent people from tampering with "evidence" that the investigators will need to look at.
- **An accident investigation will usually begin immediately after an incident.**
 - Interviews may take place as soon as the area is secured.
 - It's important to remember that the investigators need your help.
 - Be honest, and provide as much information as you can.
- **Even if you did not witness the accident yourself, investigators may want to talk with you.**
 - Especially if you are familiar with the site or the task being performed at the time of the accident.

- **Remember, the information is being gathered to help determine the exact cause of the accident, not to place blame on anyone.**
- **Determining the cause of an accident is not always easy.**
 - After all, most accidents have several "contributing" factors.
 - This is why a "Root Cause Analysis" can often help the situation.
- **A Root Cause Analysis is an examination of the chain of events that led to an accident.**
 - These events may have taken place days, weeks, even months before the accident actually occurred.
 - So it's important that the analysis be thorough.
- **Potential factors that investigators will look for include:**
 - Faulty or poorly maintained equipment.
 - Lack of training.
 - The absence of appropriate policies and procedures.
- **Root Cause Analysis looks for all of the factors that could have contributed to an accident.**
 - This is why it is always a vital part of any accident investigation.
- **You should offer as much information as you can about the accident. This includes any relevant facts regarding:**
 - The workers who were involved.
 - The site where the accident occurred.
 - The working conditions at the site.
- **A successful Root Cause Analysis relies on detail.**
 - It helps if you are familiar with the safety practices that are used in the work area where the accident occurred.
 - Don't worry about giving investigators too much information. Let them sort it out.
 - You never know when some small fact will be the key to determining what really happened, and why.

- **For example, let's say a warehouse worker is standing on the top step of a ladder and falls off.**
 - This may appear to be an easy investigation.
 - It seems obvious that the worker ignored the rule about not standing on the top step of a ladder, lost his balance and that's why he fell.

- **The worker's actions are certainly a factor, but there can be other reasons that this accident occurred as well.**
 - In order to help prevent the same type of accident from happening again, we need to look deeper.

- **We know a person fell off a ladder. We also know that he was standing on the top step.**
 - By continuing the investigation, we eventually discover that the ladder he was standing on was the tallest ladder in the warehouse.

- **The worker's carelessness is a factor, but the lack of proper equipment is the "root cause" of this accident.**
 - The warehouse needs a taller ladder so that workers can reach the highest materials without standing on the top step.
 - Remember, the ultimate goal of every accident investigation is to help prevent the incident from happening again.

- **In another example, a worker fixing a machine suddenly gets an electric shock. We might conclude that since electricity was involved:**
 - The situation was inherently hazardous.
 - Nothing much could be done to make this situation safer.

- **But it takes electricity to run the machine, and there are procedures that allow electrically powered equipment to be worked on safely.**
 - So there are probably other factors to consider.
 - For instance, should the system have been locked-out, and if so, why wasn't it?

- **We need to look at whether the worker who was repairing the machine had been given training on lock-out / tag-out procedures.**
 - If he had received lock-out / tag-out training, we would also need to determine if the worker was following the procedures that he was taught.

- **In this instance, the investigator determined that the root cause of the accident was a lack of training.**
 - The worker never attended the lock-out/tag-out class he was scheduled for, and therefore never knew the danger he was putting himself into.

- **Now let's apply Root Cause Analysis to another example.**
 - Falls are accidents that often aren't investigated fully.
 - If a person falls we usually figure that they lost their grip, or their footing.

- **But when we take a closer look we discover that the victim was not wearing his fall protection gear, and we need to find out why.**
 - While a coworker had warned them about not wearing fall protection gear...
 - ... the victim said "No time. The boss says this has to be done by noon".

- **There are a number of reasons why an employee might skip proper safety procedures... all of them bad!**
 - One of them could be a supervisor saying... "Let's get this loaded up and out of here, there's another truck arriving in 50 minutes, so get going".

- **In an attempt to increase output, a worker in a hurry can sometimes "forget" about safety.**
 - Ironically, if an accident does occur as a result, production will often slow down... or even stop altogether.

- **There are times when an accident has nothing to do with equipment, training or procedures.**
 - In these cases, investigators often find that the "root cause" of the accident is miscommunication.

- **Workers need to clearly hear and understand any instructions they receive about the job they're doing.**
 - If communications aren't clear, or there is a question about what should really be done, instructions should be repeated.
 - Everyone needs to understand the proper procedure.

- **Now let's look at how accident investigation helps make sure that the same type of incident doesn't happen again.**

- **Remember, when it comes to learning from accidents, there are four basic areas to look at:**
 - Policies.
 - Training.
 - Equipment.
 - Communication.

- **Proper training is always a key element in preventing accidents.**
 - If problems have existed with certain types of activities or situations in the past, everyone should be made aware of the potential hazards and then be trained to handle them.

- **If a situation is hazardous enough, your facility may have to put new policies into place... or existing policies may have to be updated.**
 - This can often take the form of "workplace rules", or "Standard Operating Procedures" that must be followed.

- **Many accidents are caused by faulty or misused equipment.**
 - In these cases, the equipment may need to be repaired.
 - If repairs are not possible, or if the correct equipment isn't being used, new equipment may have to be purchased.
 - Additional training may then be required.

- **If an accident was the result of faulty communication, people may need to be made aware of the factors that can make hearing what a coworker is saying difficult and how to overcome this.**
- **In many cases the solution to the problem may involve more than one of the four factors we've discussed.**
 - Investigating accidents can be an involved process.
 - The goal of an accident investigation... to determine the cause of an accident and prevent any similar accidents from happening again... is worth the effort.

*** * *SUMMARY * * ***

- **"Near misses" can teach us a lot about preventing accidents in the future.**
 - Be sure to report them.
- **In the event of an accident, remember... peoples' safety is the top priority.**
- **Cooperate with investigators. Their goal is to prevent more accidents from occurring.**
- **Provide investigators with as much information about an accident as you can.**
- **Remember that a Root Cause Analysis is an examination of the entire chain of events that led to an accident... so no detail is unimportant.**
- **When you're helping to investigate an accident, be sure to look at all the possible contributing factors, including policies, training, equipment and communication.**
- **A good accident investigation can solve the "mystery" behind any safety problem, and help you and your coworkers stay safe on the job!**