



Loss Control Insight

Accident Investigation

ARE YOU OBJECTIVE

A few years ago, a newly-hired employee lost a finger when he tried to unclog grass clippings from the discharge chute of a power lawnmower, while the mower was running. The supervisor who reported the accident described its cause as a "careless employee," although the employee had never operated a power mower before, was unsupervised at the jobsite, and was totally untrained.



"You were lucky this time, Mr. Dumpty. But I think your wall-sitting days are over."

Obviously this is an extreme case. Yet many of us in the safety field can cite similar instances when it was obvious the supervisor who reported an accident spent no time at all determining the true cause(s). Instead, he or she followed the path of least resistance and pointed the finger at the employee. The worker was "careless" or "not paying attention" or "in direct violation of rules."

While these things may play a part in an accident, they are rarely the sole reason. The worker may have been distracted by an identifiable cause that could be removed. Or perhaps he wasn't following the rules, it was accepted practice to ignore.

Employee error plays a part in many accidents, but so do physical deficiencies, procedures that have not been updated or revised, unsafe tools and equipment, a lack of written safety and health instructions, and lethargic supervision.

When a supervisor sends an apprentice out on a job without adequate verbal instruction and the apprentice injures himself, what was the true cause of the "accident?"

These points should be foremost in the safety manager's mind. That's who reviews accident reports and tries to prevent similar incidents by identifying problems and recommending what line managers can do.

Since accident reports start with supervisors, the safety manager should make sure they receive adequate training in accident investigation. They should be able to pinpoint the true cause(s) of an accident and recognize hazards.

Stress the real purpose of an accident investigation and report, which is not to ascertain blame or find a scapegoat. The point is to keep the same type of accident from recurring. A supervisor who objectively reviews the facts, determines the cause of the accident and acts to avoid repetition is a true supporter of the activity safety program.