

# ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION



## 11 Steps to an Effective Interview

### 1. Find the Witnesses

- a. Employer provides list to start with – but don't rely on it entirely. Must develop other witnesses.
- b. Identify other witnesses from "supplied" list.
- c. One witness may lead to another.
- d. Check other resources (newspaper account, hospital, police, paramedics, etc.)

NOTE: Most of the reports generated by these groups are public information and the local union can request copies.

### 2. Determine Location of Accident and Witnesses

- a. Visit accident scene and take photographs, if possible.
- b. Prepare location chart or site map marking spots where witnesses observed accident. Was witness downwind of accident? Was he/she standing with group of other witnesses.

### 3. Interview Promptly, if possible

- a. Investigator's greatest aid. Immediate interviews contain maximum detail and are usually complete. The longer the time between accident and interview, the less detail.

### 4. Establish Rapport with Witness

- a. Golden rule of interviewing – don't make your interview an "interrogation!" Has frightening connotation.
- b. Put witness at ease. Encourage him/her to tell story in own words.
- c. Assure him/her that what he/she says will be confidential.
- d. DON'T WRITE IMMEDIATELY. Listen to him/her first.

### 5. Get the Facts

- a. Consider yourself a newspaper reporter. Use five W's and H rule of news writing.
- b. Find out WHO was injured? WHEN, WHERE and HOW did it happen? WHAT were the materials or machines involved? WHY did it happen?
- c. Keep witness talking. But be patient if he/she pauses.
- d. Good follow-up question: "...and then what happened?"
- e. Courtesy and considerations should be granted at all times.
- f. Ask questions when witness completes statement. Keep them simple and avoid questions with "yes/no" answers.
- g. Do not conduct group interviews
- h. Do not ask the witness to write out a statement.

6. Be Familiar with Different Types of Witnesses
  - a. The *injured witness* – requires most diplomacy and care. May only recall what happened up to moment of accident.
  - b. The *timid witness* – considers observations unimportant. May require special moral support. Appeal to humanitarian feelings. Stress need for his/her help.
  - c. The *illiterate witness* – presents delicate problems. May be reluctant to reveal illiteracy. Avoid any possible embarrassment.
  - d. The *prejudiced witness* – should be considered dangerous to investigation. Try to find some clue that will be useful.
  - e. The *talkative witness* – may wish to voice his/her pet peeve. Impose upon them the importance of “sticking to facts.”
  - f. The *suspicious witness* – the most frequent witness. Extremely reluctant to provide information for fear of reprisal by employer. Stress need of importance of safety and health.
  - g. The *negative*, or “*know nothing*” *witness* – should not discount his/her statement. Could be used later in hearing. Must get name and address and signed statement to effect.
  
7. Get a Written Statement
  - a. Culmination of interview. Need is vital in accident investigation.
  - b. Can be used to refresh memory of witness later.
  - c. Will provide clear description of accident.
  - d. Will help reconstruct conditions prior to accident.
  - e. Establish whether or not condition is a violation of the law.
  - f. Secure information on employer’s past history.
  
8. Write It for the Witness
  - a. Tell witness you are taking his/her statement.
  - b. Follow prescribed format.
  - c. Read it back slowly to witness.
  - d. Never erase errors. Cross out word and have witness initial.
  - e. Make sure witness initials each page and signs last page.
  - f. Interviewer will witness signature.
  
9. Re-Enact the Accident
  - a. Can be important part of investigation – especially if statements are unclear.
  - b. TAKE EXTREME PRECAUTIONS TO PREVENT ACCIDENT FROM BEING REPEATED.
  - c. Individual judgement will dictate necessity of re-enactment.
  
10. Provide Copy of Witness Statement to the Witness
  
11. Thank Witness for their Cooperation