

Write an Effective Incident Report in 5 Steps

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With proper safety training and an air-tight safety program in your workplace, you won't have to write too many incident reports. However, sometimes things slip through the cracks and it results in an incident or **near-miss**. When this happens, it's not only mandated by **OSHA** to report it, but it can be imperative in future prevention of like incidents.

The best way to go about reporting an incident is to fill out an incident report and using a **safety software** for recordkeeping. The following steps will help you to write an effective incident report that covers all of the necessary elements needed for further action.

1. Respond in a timely manner

You should begin to gather the details almost immediately after receiving news and becoming aware of the incident. This will help you gather details that are fresh in the minds of those involved, and will help you be able to piece together the factors involved in the incident's occurrence.

2. Gather all of the details and facts

Having all the facts is important in being able to decipher what caused the incident and how it can be prevented in the future. It's also necessary for business insurance purposes and to help make decisions in the final stages of analysis.

Critical facts of the incident to include are:

- The date and time it occurred
- The specific location of the incident
- All of those who were involved and their immediate supervisors
 - Names
 - Title of their position
 - The department of employees involved
 - Their immediate supervisor(s)
- Names and accounts of those who witnessed the incident
- The series of events that took place leading up to the incident
- What the employee(s) involved were doing at the exact time of the incident

- The environmental conditions of the location in which it occurred
 - For example, were the floors slippery? Was the area cluttered? Was there a lot of noise? Etc.
- The circumstance or materials involved when it took place
 - For example, the tools, machinery, equipment or PPE that was involved.
- The specific injuries that were sustained to the involved parties, and what area of the body were affected
- The treatment that was administered to the employees who were injured
- Any and all damage to the equipment, materials, areas, etc.

Another resource that is beneficial for documenting events is to take pictures of where the incident took place. Note the conditions of the area and the scene(s) of the incident. If available, CCTV footage is another avenue of reviewing the chain of events that led to the incident.

3. Piece together the sequence of events

Piecing together the sequence of events will help determine which factors were involved and how they were involved at the time the incident occurred.

- The details of the events leading up to the incident.
 - What specific actions the employee was doing prior to the incident
 - What materials, tools, equipment was involved
- Determine what was involved in the incident.
 - What exactly happened to the employee
 - How they were injured
 - Why they were injured
- Identify what happened after the incident.
 - What did the employee do after the incident
 - What kind of reaction did they have
 - How did they signal for help if they were able to
 - How was it discovered that the incident occurred

The details gathered above should be specific enough so that anyone reading the report can seamlessly create a story in their mind, and can, therefore, view the incident as a whole. It often helps to create a diagram to start to visually analyze the incident.

4. Analyze your findings of the incident

You can now begin to create an in-depth analysis of what caused the events, the factors involved, and ultimately answer the “why” of the incident. With the details you gathered, you should be able to speculate the following items:

- The primary cause (Ex. a machine that wasn’t locked out released hazardous energy)
- The secondary causes (Ex. an employee did not check to see if the machine was locked out prior to maintenance)
- Additional factors (Ex. Employees haven’t received their refresher lockout tagout training)

5. Formulate a preventative action plan

An incident report is useless without a plan to correct actions for future prevention. Every incident is a hard lesson that has yet to be learned or has been overlooked. The following items are examples of areas that may need correcting based on the facts surrounding the incident:

- Adequate employee safety training
- Adequate and proper maintenance of machinery, equipment, workspace, etc.
- Re-evaluating standard operating procedures regarding certain jobs, and re-assessing how they should be carried out
- Identifying and conducting a job hazard analysis (JHA) to thoroughly cover all risks associated with certain job tasks, and carrying out the necessary safety training.
- Operational changes and adjustment that include more thorough safety measures, such as adding additional safety equipment, changing procedures, etc.

A good incident report identifies the problem using in-depth analysis and research and offers a viable solution to that problem. A thorough, well-prepared report will accurately pinpoint what corrective action is necessary so that you may prevent future incidents and keep your team safe!