Employee Incident Reporting

Why should employees report incidents?

Nothing is learned from unreported incidents. Hazards, causes and contributing circumstances are lost if not reported. Employees who don't take the time to report near misses they are involved in may not learn from them. The fact that many incidents come within inches of being disabling injury accidents makes failing to report them all the more serious.

When incidents are not reported, their causes usually go uncorrected. That means they may happen again, perhaps producing tomorrow's disabling injury or fatality. This can be illustrated by the case of the employee who slipped on a floor made slippery by a small leak in a hydraulic line. The employee did not suffer an injury. Two days later, the line was still leaking. Another employee slipped on the liquid and fell and broke her leg. The first employee volunteered his experience to the company investigating the accident. Had the worker reported his own experience promptly, the chances are that the defective hydraulic line would have been corrected before the accident happened.

Why don't workers report incidents?

- Fear of the supervisor's disapproval.
- Not wanting to lose time from the job on piece-work assignments.
- Not wanting the incident on their work records.
- Not wanting to be embarrassed by co-worker ridicule or sarcasm.
- Reluctance to spoil the unit's safety record.
- Dislike for the red tape involved.
- Failure to understand why incident should be reported.
- Not recognizing the damage that could result.
- Not wanting to be the subject of an incident investigation.

Questions that should be asked during the investigation:

- What causes the incident/near miss?
- What are the circumstances surrounding the near miss?
- Is there a safety rule covering the situation?
- Did the almost-victim know the rule?
- Were any safety devices, clothing or equipment used improperly or not used at all when they were called for?
- Have there been other near-misses of the same type?
- Was the employee aware of the hazard?
- Did the employee know the safe procedure?
- What should be done to prevent another incident?

The answers to these questions should be included in the incident report. They will suggest ways to prevent a recurrence. They may suggest some substitutions – a protective device more certain than luck, for instance.