American **Concrete Pipe** Association

SAFETY ALERT

Incident Investigations

A pipe plant employee reports an incident to his supervisor: "John just dropped a mold in the kiln, and 12 pipes fell – no one was hurt, and the crew is sweeping up the pipe – we're down for about 30 minutes." There are many scenarios and incidents that occur in pipe facilities that may go unchecked. Many times the response may be "Get the mess cleaned up and go back to work"; or "discipline the employee who caused it." These answers may work in the short term; however, most of the time, they do not eliminate the problem. In order to prevent recurrence, the best option is to investigate all incidents thoroughly to determine where the system failed and correct those issues. This will greatly reduce the likelihood it is repeated.

What are the keys to conducting productive incident investigations?

Lay the Groundwork

- Identify and train employees who will lead/participate in the investigation process for the company, plant, and workgroup prior to their participation.
- Provide awareness training to all employees in regard to the company investigation process.
- Develop a system of investigation (who is it reported to, when it is to be reported, etc.)
- Follow up and communicate with the employees, as applicable, to ensure they understand why it is important to report incidents promptly.

Begin the Investigation Immediately

- Secure the scene, interview witnesses, inspect equipment, and review the normal process or procedure.
- Determine what happened? When did it occur? Who was involved? Why did it happen?
- Center investigation results on facts; when facts are not available, make sound assumptions based upon supportive facts.

Ask Why

- For each result, ask why as many times as needed to identify a system cause. A system cause can be defined as: Any item that improves or corrects the manner in which safety is managed. Typically, this would include items such as inspection processes, a change in task process or training, program implementation or supervisory issues.

Correct, Communicate, Review

- Communicate the results (best practices and employee awareness.)
- Correct the causes. This is the key to eliminating reoccurrence.
- Follow-up and review the corrections to ensure they are being practiced.

Five Reasons to Conduct Incident Investigations

1. Moral/legal obligation.
2. Establish credibility and confidence in employees and management, which is crucial to crew morale and comfort.
3. Determine causes for the incident.
4. Develop corrective actions.
5. Prevent recurrence -share lessons learned –leverage key learning's.

Five Roadblocks to Avoid When Conducting Investigations

1. "Blame game." – An investigation concluding with an employee being the cause will normally end there. Most likely, the incident will repeat itself, as the problem lies within the process, tool, or proper monitoring and not the employee.
2. "Stopping at the initial cause." – The investigation may reveal that an improper tool was the cause. Asking one more question may lead to a system cause such as improper monitoring, a procurement issue, or improper training.
3. "Investigating from a distance." – In most cases, investigations cannot be completed from a desk.
4. "Timeliness." – The sooner the event is investigated, the better the information to determine causes. Memories fade, equipment changes, and site conditions are altered frequently.
5. "Failure to correct causes and follow up." – An investigation is not complete until the causes are corrected.

The two goals of an incident investigation are to prevent reoccurrence and to change the way safety is managed. Incidents involving employee injury or major property damage are most always investigated in a reactive manner. In order to reduce the number of reactive investigations, focus should be placed upon encouraging employees to report near misses, first aid cases, and minor property damage. Investigation and corrections for those occurrences will often prevent future incidents involving injury, lost production, or equipment damage.

"The more incidents you have – the more you need to investigate. The more you investigate, the less likely incidents are to occur. The less likely they are to occur, the fewer incidents you have. The fewer incidents you have – the less you need to investigate" Investigators Paradox

American Concrete Pipe Association • 972-506-7216 Fax 972-506-7682 • www.concrete-pipe.org