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 were 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