



"Don't Blame Anyone"

Arkansas Workers' Compensation Commission/
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Most of us have been at the scene of an auto accident - minor or otherwise. If we were personally involved, our natural tendency is often to point out the things the other driver was doing wrong. We might even be tempted to hold back part of the facts. We don't want the blame for the accident put on us.

We sometimes feel the same way about accidents that happen at work. We don't want to be at fault. In conducting an accident investigation at work, our focus should be on fixing the problem, not fixing the blame. And that's why the theme of this talk is "Don't Blame Anyone." That's simple and easy to understand, but I want to underline the theme by citing some reasons for not blaming anyone. The primary purpose of an accident investigation is to get the full and unslanted information surrounding an accident, with the goal being to prevent a similar accident from happening again.

The aim of the person conducting the investigation, and your aim in cooperating, should be fact-finding and not fault-finding. Unless you are brand new as a worker in our facility, you've heard it said many times that every accident comes from an unsafe condition, an unsafe act, or some combination of the two. In the post-accident investigation, we must discover what hazardous condition and/or improper acts occurred and the contributing factor or factors, if any.

With your help and the help of our top management, we'll make needed changes to assure better safety in the future. The accident that's happened has past. Our immediate concern should become the accidents we can prevent in the days and years ahead.

Even minor accidents should be investigated. An accident that brings only slight injury, or perhaps just property damage, needs a careful and complete review. Maybe we got a break if the accident was minor. The next time - unless you can help us prevent it - the same type of incident might maim or kill.

Have you ever thought that a certain number or kind of accidents are bound to happen in our workplace? If you have, you were in error. Every accident has a cause or contributing factor. We have to find the cause or causes, then make the right adjustments to see that accidents don't happen. If we do, and if the rules are followed, we won't have the accident again. In some cases, blame may have to be fixed - eventually. Someone may have to decide later there was a personal failure. But this should be no part of the investigative stage. Be wise and keep your wits. Don't let anger, disgust, or any other emotion get control of you.

What do you do if a worker near you is hurt in an accident? Even though you suspect what might have brought it on, you don't rush up and say "What did you do that for?" If one suffers shock or is in extreme pain, their emotions may run away with them - at first. If they want to "blow off steam," let them do it. It will ease the pressure. Then get them to calm down and talk rationally. Ask what you can do to help. Get into a conversation not directly related to the accident. Talking, safety psychologists have pointed out, reduces tensions and emotions.

Accident reports serve another purpose besides future accident prevention. They are grouped together to form nationwide, statewide, plant and department statistics. It's these statistics that tell us whether we are winning or losing the battle for safety.

Think safety! Live safety! Inspect for safety!

Help us reach a company and department safety record we can boast about. And while we're doing it, remember it's not your responsibility to put the blame on anyone.