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Risk control

Slips, Trips and Falls Toolkit: Incident Investigation



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Slips, Trips and Falls Toolkit: Incident Investigation

Introduction

When someone falls, it is important to learn lessons so that steps can be taken to prevent similar events happening in the future. This brief guidance gives advice on how to investigate a fall incident so that both the root cause and preventative solutions can be identified.

Investigating a fall

A thorough incident investigation should be conducted as soon after the event as possible. It is important to ensure that others will not be exposed to any potential hazards, but you must ensure you make the area safe before starting the investigation. Any actions taken to make the area safe should be recorded as part of the investigation process.

To maximise success, involve local managers and relevant staff in the investigation process and aim to record all pertinent details as fully and accurately as possible. The investigation should be conducted in a systematic way and it is often helpful to use a record sheet that includes prompts and specific questions.

It is recommended that photographs of the scene are taken and relevant evidence, such as condition of the footwear, are collected and/or recorded to provide a more detailed audit trail of the event. Photographic evidence should be captured as soon after the event as possible.

When taking photos consider the circumstances of the incident; for example, when investigating a fall down a stair, ensure that some of the photos show the view looking down the stair, the direction the person was likely to have been walking.

If possible, speak to the person involved in the incident and any witnesses to get their account of events. Ask them to be detailed in their account and question any aspects that are not explicit. Aim to establish what happened, what hazards were present and why the hazards were there. It is useful to consider both opinion and fact, but it is important to clarify and record which is which.

What happened?

It is important for all those involved in the investigation to recognise the difference between a slip, a trip and a fall and to understand exactly what took place.

Slips, trips and falls can be defined as follows:

- Slip – a lack of grip causes uncontrolled sliding of the foot
- Trip – the pedestrian catches their foot on an obstacle causing a loss of balance

- Fall – an unrecovered loss of balance, this can occur because of a slip or trip but also for other reasons such as miss-placing your feet on stairs or suffering a dizzy spell.

Falls happen very quickly, and people cannot always recall the initiating factor well. Be aware that people often use the terms slip, trip and fall interchangeably as a description of losing their balance. If a person slips, they tend to fall backwards; if they trip, they tend to fall forwards.

It is important to establish what the person was doing at the time of the event and where exactly it took place. Was the activity well planned and was the environment suitable?

What hazard(s) may have caused it?

Identify hazards that may have led to the event, such as contaminated floor surfaces, obstacles, exposed drops, uneven surfaces, poor visibility.

Why was the hazard present?

It is important to understand what factors lead up to the event so that the root cause (the failure from which all other failings grow) can be identified. For example, if the floor was contaminated, why was it contaminated? How did the contamination get there? Is the floor regularly contaminated? Could things be done differently to keep the floor clean and dry?

Were there any other contributing factors?

Was the person rushing or distracted at the time of the incident? Did their behaviour or work task expose them to greater risk, for example pushing/pulling a heavy load, using a mobile phone while walking or carrying items in both hands?

All of these factors make an incident more likely but don't assume that human error was the sole cause as this can inhibit from identifying other solutions that could prevent a similar incident from happening in the future.

Review

Establish what has been done historically (if anything) to prevent this type of event and investigate why these measures did not work on this occasion.

Were procedures followed? Have other similar incidents occurred? Were all the causal factors identified in a risk assessment and were the control measures appropriate and sufficient?

Assess the risk

Consider all of the factors identified in the investigation and assess how likely they are to reoccur. Consider what took place and assess whether there are any additional control measures that would be reasonably practicable to implement to reduce the risk of similar events happening in the future. Review existing risk assessments and update as necessary.

Monitor

Regularly review accident / incident and near miss reports to identify trends and highlight areas of concern. Consider using a database to capture event information as this may help to identify problematic processes, activities, equipment, locations, etc. Monitoring will also help to establish if any newly implemented controls are effective.

Get advice

If an investigation fails to identify what went wrong or to identify suitable control measures to prevent similar events occurring again, it is often helpful to gain the views of others. Always consult the workforce and encourage them to voice their concerns and propose solutions. Ask other organisations within your sector what they do and try to adopt industry best practice. Discuss any unresolved issues with a fall prevention specialist and, if necessary, try to develop bespoke solutions.

Risk Management Partners and Gallagher Bassett would like to thank QBE European Operations for the material used to shape this toolkit segment.

Further information

For access to further RMP Resources you may find helpful in reducing your organisation's cost of risk, please access the RMP Resources or RMP Articles pages on our website. To join the debate follow us on our LinkedIn page.

Get in touch

For more information, please contact your broker, RMP risk control consultant or account director.

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