

## 5. Accident Investigations

All accidents and near misses should be reviewed by City leadership. The seriousness of the accident will determine the extent of the review or investigation. The purpose of an investigation is to produce objective facts that will lead to corrective action in order to prevent further accidents from occurring. This policy is divided into two thresholds: (1) serious accidents that require Department of Labor and Industries (L&I) involvement and an investigation, and (2) minor accidents that do not require an investigation but benefit from review. The processes for both thresholds include questions that encourage a root-cause analysis to address circumstances that lead to accidents and that prevent future accidents from occurring.

### A. Accident Investigations Involving Labor and Industries ([WAC 296-800-32015](#))

The following circumstances merit an accident investigation with L&I involvement:

1. A death
2. An inpatient hospitalization
3. An amputation
4. The loss of an eye

If a worker is killed or admitted for inpatient hospitalization, the City must report the accident to L&I within 8 hours. If any worker suffers an amputation or loss of an eye, the accident must be reported within 24 hours. If the City, for any reason, is not notified of the accident until after the deadline, the accident should be reported immediately.

Human Resources is responsible for reporting accidents to L&I; inform the department director and HR as soon as possible about any of the above accidents. Staff should refer to the Reporting Procedures policy for instructions on completing internal reporting forms.

### Accident Investigation Procedures

Accident investigations can be broken down into four general steps:

1. Preserving or documenting the scene
2. Collecting information
3. Determining the cause(s)
4. Recommending corrective action for implementation

#### Preserving or Documenting the Scene

Under these circumstances, the first priorities after caring for and protecting workers are to control and maintain the accident scene. If police or fire services are needed, call 911 immediately. In scenarios where hazardous equipment or environments are involved, stabilize, and secure the equipment so they do not pose a danger, then secure the scene. Hazards posed by equipment or the environment must be stabilized before the scene is safe for re-entry during the investigation. When possible, take detailed photos and/or video before altering the scene to maintain an accurate record of the scene as it was when the accident occurred.

#### Investigation Personnel

Following the preservation of the scene of the accident, the City must prepare to support the L&I compliance officer who presents themselves at the location by appointing a staff liaison ([WAC 296-305-01503](#)). The Chief of Operations or Chief of Administration (or designees) will appoint the staff liaison.

The staff liaison will accompany the compliance officer to monitor their progress and scope of investigation, help answer any questions, and explain the accident as understood by the organization. Individuals selected for this duty must be in a management or supervisory position and have adequate knowledge of the working duties and environment and the governing safety policies and expectations. The staff liaison may duplicate in notes and photographs the work of the compliance officer for the purpose of providing the City with an accurate estimation of the information being gathered by L&I.

In addition to the L&I compliance officer and staff liaison, there are other personnel who are required to participate in the investigation. These include the immediate supervisor(s) of the employee(s) who died or sustained a serious injury, employees who were witnesses to the accident, and other employees as deemed necessary by the investigator ([WAC 296-800-32015](#)). The City may allow or require the Safety Coordinator and manager or director supervising the employees or activities involved in the accident to participate in the investigation. In cases where the severity of the accident or a conflict of interest may prevent the Safety Coordinator, manager, or director from participating in the investigation, a qualified third-party investigator will be identified.

#### Collecting information and Determining the Cause(s)

The process of collecting information following a serious accident should involve interviews and a thorough scene investigation to determine the cause(s) of the accident. Investigators should strive to identify system-based failures that led to the accident by engaging in an iterative interview and discussion process that asks “Why?” repeatedly. The goal of this process is to understand the procedural, cultural, conditional, or design failures that led to the accident so that future accidents may be prevented by addressing the underlying root cause. Investigators should conduct interviews with the injured employee(s) and all staff witnesses to the accident. The collecting information phase will end when the L&I officer(s) and staff investigators have completed all interviews and the scene investigation. The next phase will be to determine the root cause(s) of the accident.

#### Corrective Action Recommendations

Once the cause of the accident has been determined, then the City will begin implementing the identified necessary changes to prevent a similar accident from occurring in the future. This process may require one simple intervention such as repairing faulty equipment, but serious accidents may also stem from safety problems that are complex in nature. Regardless of the scale and complexity of the identified root causes of the accident, all departmental staff shall follow the recommended changes for the implementation stage to succeed. Identifying how to secure staff buy-in is a critical element of this final investigative stage. After the implementation process has been initiated, the City must create an Accident Investigation report ([WAC 296-67-04](#)), which must be shared with and reviewed by the Safety Committee ([WAC 296-800-13020](#)), which may make additional recommendations.

### **B. Minor Accident Investigations**

Minor accidents are situations that involve work-related injury, illness, property damage, or a near miss incident. An accident may only be considered minor if it does not involve a death, inpatient hospitalization, amputation, or loss of an eye. The investigation process for minor accidents is informal and consists of director review of the forms used to report the accident (see Reporting Procedures). If the Director believes the circumstances reported warrant an informal investigation, they will discuss the circumstances that led to the accident with the employee’s supervisor or manager to determine the cause and any necessary corrective action to prevent the accident from occurring again. Directors may

also choose to begin an informal investigation process if they identify a concerning trend in the reviewed reports. The Safety Committee is not obligated to review any minor accident investigations.

**Accident Investigation Training**

Staff who will undertake accident investigations must receive training on the purpose, expected work product, and recommended methods of accident investigations. Staff who conduct investigations will receive training every five years.