

“In an accident, an employee’s arm was severely injured when it got stuck between the rollers of a machine.”

Accidents can have many contributing causes and it’s important to find out both the immediate and root causes to prevent a recurrence.

Accidents can have two types of immediate cause. The first, an unsafe condition, is when plant, equipment, the work environment or system of work could cause harm, for example exposure to moving or sharp machine parts, hot surfaces, hazardous substances, workplace traffic, or an untidy workplace. Certain situations, such as starting or stopping a process, or maintenance and repair, can also increase the likelihood of accidents.

The second type of immediate cause, an unsafe act, is when someone behaves in a way that can cause harm to themselves or others, for example climbing up a 40ft-high racking system or fooling around at work.

The root causes of accidents are those things that someone does (or doesn’t do) that contribute to, or help to develop, events that lead to accidents. Dealing with the root causes of accidents can help you make sure they don’t happen again. In many cases, the root cause of an accident is poor management control and/or supervisory or management behaviour.

Many minor accidents or incidents could have resulted in more serious consequences if certain factors had been different. And like so-called ‘near misses’, they’re warnings of possible hazards you might not have identified. Not being prepared for emergencies, including not having life-saving equipment or someone with first aid skills, can increase the seriousness of an accident’s consequences.

Tips

Use accident and ill health statistical data (including the number of cases and their causes) to help you review your risk assessments, improve control measures and inform your decision-making. Lessons can be learned from statistics – they can indicate if a particular process or work activity has a developing trend in certain types of accident.

Useful link

IOSH free booklet, ‘Learning the lessons: how to respond to deaths at work and other serious incidents’
www.iosh.co.uk/index.cfm?go=technical.guidance