Written Employee Safety Program—Part III

The past two issues have covered the first 4 elements of an effective Safety Program or Illness & Injury Prevention Program (IIPP): 1) Management Commitment, 2) Communication, 3) Compliance, and 4) Inspections. These are posted on NSAA’s website. This issue will cover the 5th element, Accident Investigation. It is worth noting here that the ski industry does a fabulous job of investigating guest injuries. The challenge is transferring those skills to investigate employee injuries with the same consistency and thoroughness.

5. Accident Investigation

A primary tool you should be using to identify and recognize the areas responsible for accidents is a thorough and properly completed accident investigation. It should be in writing and adequately identify the causes(s) of the accident or near-miss occurrence…and yes, it should be required.

Accident investigations should be conducted by the supervisor of the individual who suffered the injury. The primary focus is to determine why the accident or near miss occurred, and what actions can be taken to prevent a similar occurrence. Questions to ask in an investigation include:

1. What happened? The question should be asked of the injured employee and everyone who witnessed the occurrence.

2. Why did the incident happen? The investigation must obtain all the facts surrounding the occurrence: what caused the situation to occur; who was involved; was the employee qualified to perform the functions involved in the accident; was he properly trained; were proper operating procedures established for the task involved; were procedures followed, and if not, why not; where else this or a similar situation might exist. Try to get to the root cause. For example, don’t simply accept “I was going too fast.” Why was the individual going too fast? Some answers that may evolve:

   - Employee is habitually late for work, so he is trying to catch up on workload; there is more work scheduled than the employee can possibly do, but he or she is doing their best by taking short-cuts and going too fast; employee came into work distracted and could not concentrate on the job. Was the incident a result of an unsafe condition or an unsafe action?

3. What should be done? The supervisor must determine which aspects of the operation or process require additional attention. It is important to note that the purpose here is not to establish blame, but to determine what type of constructive action can eliminate the cause(s) of the accident or near miss. Never accept “be more careful” as corrective action.

4. What action has been taken? Actions already taken to reduce or eliminate the exposures being investigated should be noted, along with those remaining to be addressed. Any interim or temporary precautions should also be noted. The solution (corrective action) should be identified in terms of how it will prevent a recurrence of the accident or near miss, but also how it will improve the overall operation. If a major change is recommended, this will assist the investigator in selling his/her solution to management.

If you have a safety committee, members should review investigations of all accidents and near-miss incidents to help recommend appropriate corrections to prevent a similar recurrence. Some general managers insist on reviewing the accident investigation. If a thorough job has not been done the investigation goes back to be redone. Remember, the goal is not to simply fill out a form, it is to prevent future injuries.

After all that work is complete, don’t forget to share the findings of the investigation at the next safety meeting. If the injury was serious, don’t wait for the next scheduled meeting—have one immediately.