

FROM REPORT TO RETURN ARTICLE SERIES:

# BUILDING STRONGER SYSTEMS TO MANAGE THE INJURY LIFECYCLE

## ARTICLE 1

### THE FIRST 24 HOURS: INJURY REPORTING AND DOCUMENTATION DONE RIGHT

Authors:

**Tracy Thornton**, BSN, RN, CCM

**Heather Chapman**, MS, CSP, CHMM, CEAS

*[paradigm-safety.com](http://paradigm-safety.com)*



When an employee is injured, the impact doesn't stop with them. The consequences to the employee can be long-lasting, but the impact also creates a tidal wave that can disrupt our teams for days, weeks, or even years. The first 24 hours are your chance to control the damage. Make them count.

This article explores best practices for injury reporting, response, and documentation through the lens of a serious workplace injury: a distal biceps tendon rupture. Common among manual laborers, this injury demands immediate attention. Delay in care can lead to tendon retraction, scarring, and permanent strength loss. Surgical repair is most successful within two weeks; after six, full reattachment may no longer be possible. If untreated, workers may lose up to 30% of elbow flexion and 50% of supination strength, impacting job performance and daily tasks. Unlike proximal biceps tears, which often preserve strength, distal ruptures require urgent referral to a specialist. Early reporting and prompt care are essential to avoid long-term disability.

## WHY EARLY REPORTING IS CRITICAL

Quick reporting of workplace injuries is critical for both employees and employers. When an injury is reported promptly, the employee can receive immediate and appropriate medical attention which increases the likelihood of a full recovery and minimizes complications. For employers, early reporting helps ensure the worker is directed to an approved occupational health provider (if your state allows), receives a correct diagnosis, and begins the right course of treatment. This all supports faster recovery, a sense of purpose, and helping contain workers compensation claims costs.

## INJURY REPORTING PROCESS

Supervisors play a critical role in workplace injury reporting and must understand the importance of a clear, efficient process. Reporting should be simple, not burdensome, and employees need to know when, how, and to whom to report injuries without fear or confusion. Supervisors should encourage immediate reporting and respond with urgency and care.

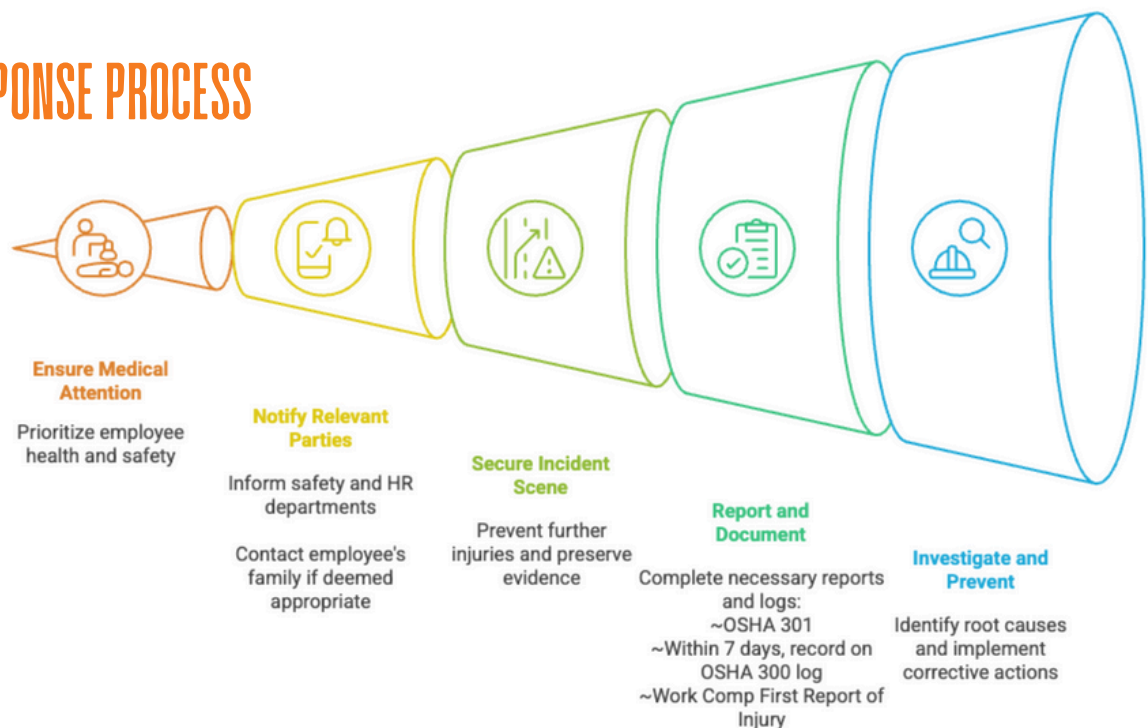


In the aftermath of a workplace injury, such as a distal biceps tendon rupture, what gets documented and how quickly can determine whether an employee receives timely treatment or encounters unnecessary delays. While the medical response is urgent, the follow-up documentation is equally critical in ensuring the claim is processed efficiently. Proper, timely, and thorough reporting can significantly streamline the process, whereas gaps or errors can cause avoidable setbacks. Unfortunately, common challenges arise when administrative teams submit incomplete or missing forms, which can hinder treatment approval, delay claims processing, and complicate regulatory compliance.

Accurate and consistent information across all these reports is vital. For example, specifying which arm was affected and describing the incident with clear details, such as: "The employee experienced a sudden, sharp pain in the right upper arm while lifting a 50-pound box, which was subsequently diagnosed as a distal biceps tendon rupture," helps confirm that the mechanism of injury (MOI) aligns with the diagnosis. This clarity supports the treating physician's clinical assessment and reduces questions or delays from claims adjusters. Medical provider documentation, including work status updates or release forms, also plays a key role in managing the employee's care and return-to-work plan.

By being proactive and thorough with documentation from the outset, employers not only streamline claim handling and support timely treatment but also reinforce a culture of safety, accountability, and care.

## INCIDENT RESPONSE PROCESS FUNNEL





Timely reporting protects the employee's health and supports compliance, proper care coordination, and cost control. Supervisors set the tone, and when they model responsiveness and clarity, it reinforces a culture of safety and trust.

## DIRECTING CARE

It starts with a loud pop! A sharp pain shoots through the arm, and just like that, everything changes. A warehouse employee, lifting a heavy box like they've done a thousand times before, drops it mid-air. Their biceps tendon has ruptured. In an instant, this isn't just a medical emergency, it's a test of how ready your organization really is.

Distal biceps ruptures happen fast and, if not treated quickly, can leave lasting weakness and permanent loss of function. In those first few moments, stress is high and panic can set in. That's when clear-headed, compassionate action makes all the difference: getting the injured worker to the right medical provider, making sure paperwork and insurance details are squared away, calling ahead to smooth the intake process. And equally important, reassuring the employee. Explaining that a workers' comp adjuster will call. That this is part of the process. That they're not alone.

But here's the truth: a strong response doesn't start with the injury, it starts with the systems and culture in place long before it happens. It's in how we train supervisors on day one, how we educate teams about the reporting process, and how we navigate state-specific rules, like Michigan's 28-day directed care period or Wisconsin's more employee-led approach.

And one of the most overlooked tools? Relationships. Take the time to bring occupational health providers or orthopedic surgeons on-site. Let them see the jobs. Talk with your teams. Build trust before anyone is hurt. It might feel like a small gesture, but it lays the foundation for faster decisions, better care, and a culture that shows we're ready.



## COMMON PITFALLS WITHIN FIRST 48 HOURS



## CREATING A CULTURE OF TRANSPARENCY AND NON-RETALIATION

Creating a culture of transparency starts with psychological safety. Employees must feel safe to speak up without fear of blame, punishment, or negative consequences. When workers trust that their concerns will be heard and respected, they're far more likely to report injuries or near misses early, even minor ones. This early reporting is essential for getting the right care quickly, reducing the severity of injuries, and improving long-term outcomes. It also helps organizations spot trends and take proactive steps to prevent future incidents.

Leaders play a central role in reinforcing this transparent culture. They must be trained to respond supportively when injuries occur, checking in with injured workers, helping them navigate the process, and expressing genuine care. These actions not only support recovery but can significantly reduce the risk of claims escalating into litigation. Integrating injury reporting expectations into onboarding and regular training helps ensure employees know what to do and feel prepared in the event of an incident. Transparency also means tracking and sharing injury trends, celebrating safety improvements, and using data to drive better decisions, not to place blame, but to prevent future harm.

Over time, this consistent messaging and leadership behavior shifts how safety is perceived: from a compliance requirement to a shared responsibility. When employees see that reporting leads to action, and not discipline, they're more likely to engage, and organizations are better positioned to create safer, healthier workplaces.

Injury response isn't just a policy, it's a reflection of your culture, your organization's preparedness, and values. The first 24 hours set the tone for everything that follows: the employee's recovery, the effectiveness of your claims process, and the trust placed in you. By prioritizing early reporting, equipping supervisors with the right tools, and fostering an open, blame-free environment, organizations can turn a moment of crisis into an opportunity to show that they care.

For questions about best practices, recordkeeping requirements, and injury management, contact Heather at [heather@paradigm-safety.com](mailto:heather@paradigm-safety.com) or Tracy at [tracythornton.bsn@gmail.com](mailto:tracythornton.bsn@gmail.com)

## HEATHER CHAPMAN, MS, CSP, CHMM, CEAS

Heather has 25 years of experience working in logistics, retail, manufacturing, academia, and hospitals. Heather has partnered with numerous organizations to conduct gap analyses and design plans to implement sustainable safety systems that involve employees at all levels of the organization. She uses practical problem-solving with unique approaches to help get safety cultures back on track or energized to the next level. Heather helps organizations think beyond compliance and inspires a holistic approach to safety programs.

**Contact Heather:** [heather@paradigm-safety.com](mailto:heather@paradigm-safety.com)

## TRACY THORNTON, BSN, RN, CCM

Tracy is a healthcare strategist with 20 years of experience, specializing in workers' compensation, injury prevention, and recovery optimization. She helps organizations understand the complexities of workers' compensation by bridging clinical care and insurance operations, integrating objective, data-driven insights with the human side of recovery to design care strategies that reduce claim costs while improving patient outcomes. She's passionate about proactive collaboration and closing care gaps, known for building partnerships and driving measurable impact aligned with patient and business goals.

**Contact Tracy:** [tracythornton.bsn@gmail.com](mailto:tracythornton.bsn@gmail.com)