

## **WHAT IS A NEAR MISS?**

A *Near Miss* is an unplanned event that did not result in injury, illness, or damage- but had the potential to do so. Only a fortunate chain of events prevented the injury or damage from occurring. Many organizations wait for losses to occur before taking steps to prevent a reoccurrence. Near miss incidents often precede loss producing events but may be overlooked as there was no harm, no injury, or no damage. An organization might not have a reporting culture where employees are encouraged to report close calls or near misses.

**Below is a list of questions for employees and employers to ask themselves when a near miss occurs:**

- How do you handle these incidents in your workplace?
- What's your attitude toward a near miss?
- Do you feel momentarily relieved that what happened wasn't any worse?
- Do you just return to your routine after the near miss occurs?
- Do you simply tell yourself that you should be more careful next time?
- Do you have a plan for preventing a repeat performance?

## **CONDUCT NEAR MISS TRAINING SESSIONS**

A close call is a call to action. What a person does about these warnings can make all the difference between future injuries and a zero-accidents safety record. Employees need to seize the moment and use the close call as a training opportunity to prevent the imminent accident.

When an unfortunate near miss occurs, call a safety meeting to discuss what actually happened, what could have happened, and ways to ensure it doesn't happen again. This may be the perfect opportunity to conduct a full-scale training session on near misses in general and what employees should be looking out for in a particular environment. It is also a chance for an employer to hear firsthand from an employee what he or she thinks are safety hazards within the workplace. Opening up a discussion with the topic of safety at the center is a chance for employees and employers to share ideas, tips and concerns. It's only an advantage for an employer to develop a preventative—not reactive—safety program. The warning signs of near misses should never be neglected or ignored; employees and employers understanding what happened will reduce or control any future hazards.

## **REMOVING HAZARDS**

Hazards should be removed as soon as possible, but they still should be reported to supervisors so they can make note of it—even after the hazard has been removed. By discussing these near misses and hazards, it can raise awareness for employees to look out for other hazards that should be reported to a supervisor.

Damaged equipment and property should also immediately be reported to a supervisor. Examples of damaged equipment might include fractured hand tools, power tools that give a shock, machine guards that don't fit or work properly, forklifts with damaged parking brakes, ladders with broken rungs and worn PPE. Examples of damaged property might include crumbling stairs, loose handrails, loose plates in the floor, holes in the floor, loose hinges on the door and broken sidewalks. While some of these examples may not seem important or particularly hazardous, it's important to note that employers and employees need to be aware of these hazards, as well.

## **How Can Employers Encourage Workers to Participate in Near Miss Reporting?**

Employers must establish a reporting culture reinforcing that every opportunity to identify and control hazards, reduce risk and prevent harmful incidents, must be acted on. The reporting system needs to be non-punitive and, if desired, anonymous. Near misses should be investigated to identify the root cause that resulted in the circumstances that lead to the near miss. The investigation results should be used to improve safety systems, hazard control, risk reduction, and lessons learned. All of these represent opportunity for training, feedback on performance, and a commitment to continuous improvement.

- Create a policy and procedure that is communicated to all employees with the backing of senior management
- Promote a culture of reporting with the support and help of all managers and supervisors.
- Educate employees on the reason why near miss reporting is a necessity, the important role that they play, and the process for reporting.
- Ensure that the near miss reporting process is easy to understand and use.
- Continue to communicate on the importance of near miss reporting encouraging the participation of all employees.
- Use the near miss reporting as a leading indicator and report back to the organization on the positive steps taken to improve workplace safety.
- Reinforce with employees that near miss reporting is non-punitive.
- Consider incentives that encourage reporting and enhance the culture. (Incentives that have the potential to discourage reporting must be avoided.)
  - An example of a good incentive is one that recognizes the participation of workers in the recognition and reporting of hazards. This activity helps to enhance a reporting culture, engage workers in meaningful safety activities, and continue a process of risk reduction.
  - An example of a poor incentive is one that recognizes supervisory and management performance based on outcome OSHA recordable rates. This type of incentive has been shown to suppress reporting and can lead to punitive actions that further undermine safety efforts.
- Include training for new employees as a part of their orientation.
- Celebrate the success and value of the near miss reporting process with all employees!