



Near-Miss Reporting: You Can't Fix What You Don't Know About

Take A Close Look at Close Calls

According to the National Safety Council, 75 percent of all accidents are preceded by one or more close calls. The difference between a close call and an accident might be a fraction of an inch or a split second of time. Either way, a close call is a call to action.

There are few "real" accidents that come completely out of nowhere, like a meteor falling out of the sky and hitting someone on the ground. Most accidents can be predicted and prevented.

Close calls are predictors. They're warnings that safety-wise something is wrong and requires immediate attention—otherwise the near miss this time will be an accident next time.

So if your employees and supervisors just say, "Thank goodness!" and go back about their business when there's a close call, you have a big safety problem. A close call means that the worker was lucky not to have had an accident. It doesn't mean that he or she—or somebody else—will be lucky again if the hazard remains.

Strike While the Iron Is Hot

Most close calls result from a combination of factors. Although human error is often one cause, other hazards often play a role as well. These include:

- Poor lighting
- Inadequate ventilation
- Lack of a warning sign
- A missing machine guard
- Lack of effective safety rules

Often, too, it's not one big hazard but a lot of little things that just happen to take place at the same time. And, as we said, in most cases the same factors that caused a close call will eventually come together again to cause an accident.

Whatever factors are involved in a close call—including the human factor—they are easily correctible. Training will correct human error, and the other issues can be fixed with simple management intervention.

But to prevent a looming accident, you have to move quickly and seize the opportunity to eliminate the hazards that caused the close call.

Find Out What Happened and Why

Every close call needs to be investigated just like an actual accident.

- Examine the scene and look for clues about exactly what happened.
- Talk to everyone involved and to witnesses as well.
- Look for circumstances that might have contributed to the close call. For example, did the time or place have something to do with it? Maybe it was on the night shift and fatigue or poor visibility were factors. Were new or untrained workers involved? Were any safety rules ignored? Or were rules specific to the incident lacking?
- Discuss the incident with supervisors, employees, and also with outside experts, if necessary, to get ideas and perspective.
- Complete an accident/near-miss report. Getting the incident on paper will help prevent it from being forgotten or ignored.

Take Action

Share your report with employees and management alike. Make sure everyone who needs to know about it finds out what happened and what you're doing to prevent it from happening again.

And then take the necessary actions to eliminate or control the hazards that caused the near miss. This is, of course, the essential part of the process. If you don't act now, you'll pay the price later when somebody really gets hurt or killed.