



Near Miss Reporting Systems

Key Points

- Incidents occur every day at the workplace that could result in a serious injury or damage.
 - A near-miss program may help prevent future incidents.
 - One problem that companies must overcome is employee's fear of being blamed after reporting a near miss.
- Employers need to make the process of reporting a near miss as easy as possible.

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 break in the chain of events prevented an injury, fatality or damage; in other words, a miss that was nonetheless very near.

A faulty process or management system invariably is the root cause for the increased risk that leads to the near miss and should be the focus of improvement. Other familiar terms for these events are a “**close call**,” a “**narrow escape**,” or in the case of moving objects, “**near collision**” or a “**near hit**.”

How Do Near Miss Reporting Systems Prevent Future Incidents?

Many safety activities are reactive and not proactive, and some organizations wait for losses to occur before taking steps to prevent a recurrence. Near miss incidents often precede loss producing events but may be overlooked as there was no harm (no injury, damage or loss). An organization may not have a reporting culture where employees are encouraged to report these close calls. Thus, many opportunities to prevent the incidents are lost. History has shown repeatedly that most loss producing events (incidents), both serious and catastrophic, were preceded by warnings or near miss incidents. Recognizing and reporting near miss incidents can significantly improve worker safety and enhance an organization's safety culture.

What are Best Practices in Establishing a Near Miss Reporting System?

- Leadership 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 by the person reporting, anonymous.
- Investigate near miss incidents to identify the root cause and the weaknesses in the system that resulted in the circumstances that led to the near miss.
- Use investigation results 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.
- Near miss reporting is vitally important to preventing serious, fatal and catastrophic incidents that are less frequent but far more harmful than other incidents.



Why Should Employers Implement Near Miss Reporting Systems?

Near miss reporting systems:

- Capture sufficient data for statistical analysis, correlation studies, trending, and performance measurement (improvement over baseline).
- Provide convenient opportunity for “employee participation,” a basic component of a successful safety management system.
- Create an open culture whereby everyone shares and contributes in a responsible manner to their own safety and that of their fellow workers.
- Can be considered to be a leading indicator of performance used in balance with other leading and lagging measures of performance.

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



- 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!

What are Best Practices from Award Winning Companies?

Companies who excel at safety and have close to zero incidents utilize near-miss reporting in various ways, whether as a leading indicator of safety performance, a component of a hazard identification system, or as a mechanism for engaging and empowering employees at different levels throughout an organization. The following are examples of how these best in class companies have implemented model near miss reporting systems which have contributed to excellence in health and safety.

- **A petroleum company that implemented a hazard identification initiative, and gained greater involvement of all employees in risk assessment and work planning.** Employees at all levels use their discretion to spot and fix problems before they result in harm with the added benefit of greater responsibility for their work, including the utilization of safe working practices.
- **A manufacturer uses event and near-miss analysis as a key to achieving the organization's stated objective of zero incidents.** The event system incorporates a methodology of event recording, ensuring detailed information on each incident that, in turn, generates lessons to be shared throughout the organization.
- **An engineering company utilizes an Occurrence Reporting System that records safety-related near misses and incidents across the site, which management reviews on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis for trends and improvement actions.** An important part of this successful system is fostering an atmosphere where employees feel comfortable coming forward without fear of retaliation.
- **A fertilizer manufacturer uses leading indicators at individual and department levels, reinforcing personal involvement and improving the perceptions individuals and work teams have about their control and management of injuries.** Key to this is the promotion of near miss reporting and rewarding diligent employees who report the most near miss incidents, or "unsafe conditions or acts."
- **A chemical manufacturer tracks the lower part of the "injury pyramid" (as leading indicators), which include near misses, to help predict areas where more significant injuries are likely to occur.** The near miss reporting process encourages employees to take actions to resolve issues, at least temporarily, until permanent controls can be implemented. In addition, all employees are required to set personal safety goals in their performance metrics, which are tracked against items that have been identified as precursors to injuries.



Other Resources on Near Miss Reporting Systems

- American National Standards Institute (ANSI) Z10 – 2012 Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems.
- NSC Safety+Health Online "Everybody gets to go home in one piece – How reporting close calls can prevent future incidents", <http://www.nsc.org/safetyhealth/Pages/112Everybodygetstogohome.aspx>
- OSHA Safety and Health Management Systems eTool: Accident/Incident Investigation, http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/safetyhealth/mod4_factsheets_accinvest.html

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