

# The value of near-miss reporting

By Joe Thatcher



The intent of this discussion is to draw awareness to an important method of incident prevention. Have a copy of your company's incident-reporting procedure and an incident investigation report for this discussion. Encourage employees to participate in the discussion. Avoid assigning blame; this will only discourage near-miss reporting.

Introduce the topic of near-miss reporting to the group. Ask have you ever said that was close!, or I could have been hurt. If the answer is yes, you probably were involved in a near-miss incident. Sometimes these incidents also are called near-hits or close calls, but these seemingly lucky breaks, with no injuries or property damage, often go unreported and soon are forgotten.

What is lost is a free lesson in injury prevention. The few minutes spent reporting and investigating near-miss incidents can help prevent similar incidents, and even severe injuries. That is why many companies require reporting and tracking of near-miss incidents with the same scrutiny as incidents involving an injury. The difference between a near miss and an injury is typically a fraction of an inch or a split second.

Ask why many near-miss incidents go unreported. Many employers and employees may not identify them as a reportable occurrence, but it is more often human nature that keeps these lessons from improving the

safety system. People may resist reporting for a number of reasons, including:

- They do not want to be blamed for problems or mistakes;
- They do not want to create more work;
- They do not want to be perceived as a trouble-maker or careless.

Supervisors should encourage feedback on near misses by maintaining a positive approach to gathering information and, avoid placing blame on an individual or group.

Ask has anyone witnessed an incident that had the potential to cause injury or property damage, and why did the event not result in an injury.

Whether there is no injury, a small bruise or scratch, or an amputation, the consequences of unsafe acts and conditions are left to chance. A ratio showing a relationship between the number of near-miss incidents and injury incidents reported by researchers shows that for every 15 near-miss incidents, there will be one injury. In other words, there are 15 missed opportunities to prevent an injury.

Ask what corrective actions have been implemented as a result of a near-miss investigation. Cite examples of corrective actions taken as a result of near-miss investigations.

Share with the group that statistics show that an injury will eventually result if near-miss incidents continue to occur. It is only a matter of time before unsafe acts and conditions meet with the right timing and circumstance to become an injury.

However, by focusing on identification and analysis of near-miss incidents, injuries become much less likely to occur. The goal is to institute changes to prevent future occurrences.

Ask what behaviors or conditions can cause a near-miss incident. Examples include:

- Failure to maintain or repair equipment;
- Removal of machine guards;
- Failure to keep walkways free of slip, trip or fall hazards;
- Inadequate training or personal protective equipment;
- Not following procedures or poor procedure enforcement.

No matter what the reason, if unsafe acts or conditions are identified and corrected, injuries most likely can be prevented.

Ask what other information would be important to preventing future incidents. Examples include:

- Factors contributing to the incident (include unsafe acts and/or unsafe conditions);
- Corrective actions necessary;
- Responsibility for corrective action and date to be completed.

In general, collect as much information as possible but remember the key point: The information must be effectively communicated throughout the organization to increase its value.

Ask what tools, actions, attitudes or other things would make it easier to report and track your near-miss incidents. Examples include:

- The process assesses no blame;
- Individuals and groups are not used as examples;
- Forms are simple, reporting is easy;
- Forms are readily available;
- Positive recognition for those who report close calls;
- Accountability for corrective actions.

Tell the group they cannot afford to ignore a near miss. The concept is simple: if near-miss incidents are ignored, valuable safety lessons are lost. If the causes of these incidents are not corrected, chances are good that an injury will result. If corrective action is taken on all close calls, injuries may be prevented. Report all near-miss incidents. It is a proposition you cannot afford to ignore.

Conclude by stressing to document all near misses. Incident prevention begins with identification. All near-miss incidents should be immediately documented using your company's incident report form and incident reporting procedures.

## References

### Web sites

- Accident/Incident Investigation (Occupational Safety and Health Administration): [www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/safetyhealth/mod4\\_factsheets\\_accinvest.html](http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/safetyhealth/mod4_factsheets_accinvest.html)
- Accident Investigation (Occupational Safety and Health Administration): [www.osha.gov/SLTC/accidentinvestigation/index.html](http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/accidentinvestigation/index.html)
- Investigating Accidents (eLCOSH): [www.elcosh.org/record/document/310/d000290.ppt](http://www.elcosh.org/record/document/310/d000290.ppt)
- Accident Investigation (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety): [www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/investig.html](http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/investig.html)
- One-hour safety presentation: Accident Analysis (Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation): [www.ohiobwc.com/employer/programs/safety/SandHTrain.asp](http://www.ohiobwc.com/employer/programs/safety/SandHTrain.asp)

### Videos

BWC's Division of Safety & Hygiene's video library has a number of videos on accident investigation and incident reporting. These are available for loan to Ohio employers. Order a catalog by calling 1-800-OHIOWC (ask for the video library), or visit our Web site, [ohiobwc.com](http://ohiobwc.com).

**Joe Thatcher** is a professional engineer and certified safety professional, and a member of the Society of Ohio Safety Engineers.

We always strive to improve the *Safety Leader's Discussion Guide*. Your feedback can help. Please e-mail your comments to [Safety@ohiobwc.com](mailto:Safety@ohiobwc.com).