

INVESTIGATING NEAR MISSES



A near miss is an occurrence where the elements of an accident are present but, due to the timing of events or an indirect interaction of a current safety control measure, no injury or physical loss occurred. A near miss event can be expected to repeat itself and will result in an injury or physical loss the majority of the time without intervention of additional safety controls. OSHA defines a near miss as an incident in which there is no property damage and no personal injury, but where, given a slight shift in time or position, damage or injury easily could have occurred. Near misses can be referred to as; close calls, near accidents, accident precursors, injury-free events, and in the case of moving objects, near collisions.

The key point from the definition above, provided partly from Travelers Insurance, is that the incident will repeat itself. Rarely are incidents single occurrences, happening only once and therefore will occur again. This is viewed as a predictive indicator of a future occurrence and should be investigated to find the true cause of what happened. Learning from experiences is the best teacher to prevent a future occurrence. By reviewing the incident, we can teach others how to avoid the situation and thus prevent a repeat occurrence.

Most safety activities are reactive, and not proactive, therefore we are responding after something happened. Many organizations wait for losses to occur (reactive) before taking steps to prevent a recurrence. Near miss incidents often precede loss-producing events, but are largely ignored because nothing (no injury, damage, or loss) happened. Employees are not encouraged or required to report these close calls, as there has been no disruption or loss in the form of injuries or property damage. Thus, many opportunities to prevent the accidents that the organization has not yet had are lost. Recognizing and reporting near miss incidents can make a major difference to the safety of workers within organizations. History has shown repeatedly that most loss producing events (accidents) were preceded by warnings or near accidents, sometimes also called narrow escapes or near hits.

By developing a near miss investigation system, potential injuries and / or property losses can be reduced drastically. Collecting near miss reports helps create a culture that seeks to identify and control hazards, which will reduce risks and the potential for harm. The safety culture should be one of ownership by the entire team and viewed as preventative. The key to implementing a program that will work is to overcome the stigma associated with reporting and following through with a thorough accident investigation.

Encourage employees to participate and report all incidents and near misses.
Investigate the near miss as you would any other incident.
Learn from what you find in your investigation.