

:: Near Miss ::

What's the difference between a "near miss" and an accident? A near miss is similar to an accident with the exception that a near miss does not result in injury or property damage. No matter how trivial they are, near misses should be reported to your supervisor just as accidents are. As an employee, you need to understand that it's just as important (and part of your responsibility) to report a near miss as it is to report an accident. Reporting near misses in a timely manner can help determine how to prevent a recurrence that could result in a serious injury.

Nothing is learned from unreported near misses. Hazards, causes and contributing factors are lost if not reported. Employees who don't take the time to report near misses they experience may not learn from them and neither will others who were not involved. The fact that many near misses come within inches of being disabling injury accidents makes failing to report them all the more serious.

When near misses are not reported, their causes usually go uncorrected. That means they may happen again, possibly producing a disabling injury or, worse yet, a fatality. This can be illustrated by the case of an employee at a "local industry" plant who slipped on a floor that was wet due to a small leak in a hydraulic line. The employee did not suffer an injury and basically walked away not reporting the situation or taking time to ensure the area was appropriately marked so others would use caution. Two days later, with the line still leaking, another employee slipped in the liquid and fell, breaking her leg in the process. After the situation occurred, the first employee told those who were investigating the accident about his experience regarding the leak and how the line had been leaking for several days. If the first worker would have reported his experience promptly, chances are the defective hydraulic line would have been corrected, or at least the area properly marked, so that the accident would not have occurred.

If you have not reported near misses in the past, ask yourself why. Do any of your reasons sound like these?

- Fear of your supervisor's disapproval.

- Not wanting to lose production time due to reporting the near miss.
- Not wanting the near miss on your work records.
- Not wanting to be embarrassed by coworkers' ridicule or sarcasm.
- Not wanting to spoil the unit's safety record.
- Failure to understand why you should report the incident.
- Not being able to recognize the damage that could result.

So what causes incidents/near misses?

- What are the circumstances surrounding the near miss?
- Is there a safety rule covering the situation?
- Did the person involved know the rule?
- Were any safety devices or PPE/clothing not used or used incorrectly?
- Have there been other near misses of the same type?
- Was the employee aware of the hazard?
- Did the employee know the safe and proper procedure?

The answers to the questions above should be included when reporting a near miss because they can suggest ways to prevent a recurrence. The answers may suggest some substitutions, such as a protective device, instead of good luck!

Taking the opportunity to report near misses can mean a much safer and healthier work environment for you and your coworkers and can also mean going home as you came in, in one piece!