



Near Misses

Generally speaking, a near miss is a condition or unplanned event that didn't result in an injury, illness or damage to equipment or property but had the potential to do so. Focusing on near misses helps you reduce the likelihood of having major incidents or minimize the damage they might cause if they do occur. But many near misses go unreported. And when they are reported, companies don't always respond appropriately. That's why managing near misses is so tricky for safety professionals. So here are answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs) about this often frustrating safety topic.

Q. What's the Best Way to Define "Near Miss"?

A. The term "near miss" may mean different things to different people. So to ensure that everyone in your workplace is on the same page when it comes to near misses, you must first clearly define this term. If the overriding objective is to improve workplace safety, it makes sense for this definition to be broad and encompass a wide range of events. One suggested definition: A near miss is an opportunity to improve health and safety in a workplace based on a condition or an incident with potential for more serious consequences, including:

- Unsafe conditions, such as wet floors;
- Unsafe behaviour, such as a worker modifying PPE for comfort while impacting its effectiveness;
- Minor incidents/injuries that had potential to be more serious;
- Events where injury could have occurred but didn't;
- Events where property damage could have resulted but didn't;
- Events where a safety barrier was challenged, such as a worker bypassing a machine guard; and
- Events where potential environmental damage could have resulted but didn't.

Q. Should Workers Be Required to Report Near Misses?

A. Yes. After all, you can only manage near misses and learn from them if you know about them. So you should require workers to report a near miss, preferably in writing, to a supervisor or other appropriate individual, such as the safety coordinator. Having a clear and simple procedure for reporting near misses will encourage workers to do so.

In addition, the OHS laws require workers to report near misses. All jurisdictions' OHS laws impose duties on workers. And although none of them specifically include a duty to report near misses, they all infer such a duty by requiring workers to either report any hazards or harmful conditions, which arguably includes near misses, or take reasonable care to ensure their own safety and that of their coworkers, such as by reporting near misses.

