

# Talks **ZONE**

**Safety Talks  
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T4212

## Do not dismiss near misses

Some of us seem only to learn the hard way. An accident happens, someone is injured or killed, and an investigation ensues. The cause is determined and action is taken to make sure it doesn't happen again.

Lessons learned.

What about all those 'almost happened' accidents — the ones that are routinely ignored because there was no harm done to people or property?

For every incident that does cause harm, there are dozens that don't—also known as near misses or close calls.

These should be regarded as a warning flag, a sign that something is very wrong and requires attention. They can be an easier way to learn hard lessons, yet all too often they are ignored.

Why? Typical reasons are:

- Fear of reprimand or repercussions.
- Red tape.
- Not knowing the importance of reporting near misses in controlling future accidents.
- Embarrassment.
- Spoiling of a safety or production record.
- Lack of response when similar issues were brought up to management.

When we narrowly avoid accidents and injuries, neither we nor management should ever shrug them off. Someone — the employee who had the near miss or someone else— is likely to be injured eventually by that same hazard.

Most close calls result from a combination of factors. The same things that cause near misses also cause accidents.

Although human error is often one cause, other factors often play a role as well. These include:

- Poor housekeeping.



- Poor lighting.
- Inadequate ventilation.
- Lack of a warning sign.
- A missing machine guard.
- Lack of effective safety rules and procedures.

Near misses have value in that they can underscore the need to conduct or revisit a job safety analysis (JSA) that identifies potential hazards in a given situation.

There is also a legal aspect to reporting close calls. It is considered an important part of a company's "due diligence," which means all reasonable precautions are taken to prevent injuries or accidents in the workplace.

By incorporating information from near miss investigations into revised, improved policies and procedures, employers can demonstrate they are practicing due diligence.

Near misses can be excellent training opportunities. Some organizations call a safety meeting following any near miss to discuss what happened, what could have happened, and how to make sure it doesn't happen again.

It is important to report a near miss even if you have removed the hazard or corrected the problem yourself. Many near misses are indications of larger safety problems that need attention, such as poor housekeeping, an inadequate maintenance plan, poor work area layout, faulty work procedures or insufficient training in safe work practices.

So how do you determine if you should report a near miss? Here are some examples:

- You observe or know of an event that might have injured a person if he or she had been present while the event was occurring (e.g. shelf falling down, but no one in the room at the time).
- Equipment failure that could have resulted in a serious injury if a person had been using the equipment or had been in the immediate vicinity when the equipment failed (e.g. dislodged fan blade that could have struck a worker).
- You observe or suspect a weakness in a process or procedure that could lead to an unsafe action/condition (e.g. potential for a worker's hair to become entangled on moving machine part while operating).

Forms are the usual method by which near misses are reported and many employers are quite willing to accept anonymous submissions.

If you keep silent about a close call you might find yourself having to explain why a co-worker ended up in the hospital because of a hazard you knew existed but failed to report or fix because you ignored it or didn't think it was important.

## The Quiz

These questions are meant to help you remember what was discussed today — not to test your patience or challenge your intelligence. The answers are at the bottom of the page. Cover them up, and complete the quiz as quickly as you can.

1. An incident that could have caused harm to people or property, but didn't, should always be reported.  
TRUE \_\_\_\_ FALSE \_\_\_\_
2. Is fear of reprisal or repercussion among the reasons why workers do not report near misses?  
YES \_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_
3. Which of these can cause an accident or a near miss?
  - A. Poor housekeeping
  - B. Poor lighting
  - C. Unsafe acts
  - D. Missing machine guard
  - E. All of the above
4. Encouraging near miss reporting is NOT an important part of an employer's 'due diligence' obligation.  
TRUE \_\_\_\_ FALSE \_\_\_\_
5. Near misses can provide an opportunity for:
  - A. Safety meetings.
  - B. A change in procedures.
  - C. A day off work.
  - D. Equipment repair or replacement.
6. Is it important to report a near miss if you have removed the hazard yourself?  
YES \_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_
7. Which of these are examples of near misses that should be reported:
  - A. Unsafe conditions, such as poorly maintained equipment, oil or grease on floors.
  - B. Unsafe behavior, such as co-workers hurrying and taking risks to complete a task or to wrap up a job at quitting time.
  - C. Unsafe procedures, such as lockout/tagout that does not fully protect workers during a maintenance or repair operation.
  - D. All of the above.
8. Does your workplace have a near miss reporting process in place?  
YES \_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_ DON'T KNOW \_\_\_\_

**ANSWERS:** 1. True, 2. Yes, 3. E., 4. False, 5. A., B., D., 6. Yes, 7. D., 8. Your answer

## Hold These Thoughts

Detailed analysis of an incident can result in a safer and more productive work environment. However, many employers only analyze incidents that result in injuries and/or property damage, even though there can be great preventive benefit from looking carefully into near misses and substandard conditions.

A structured system should be in place for incident analysis in order to ensure a consistent approach.

Effective incident analysis also requires that analysts are trained. Their efforts should focus on what allowed the incident to occur. To encourage open communication and promote worker reporting, incident analysis should never focus on the individual, but rather on the situation and the conditions that allowed the incident to happen.

Objectivity is essential. It should not be assumed that an accident was caused by carelessness or that contradictory information indicated falsehood.

The entire job needs to be examined. The process must go beyond looking for one basic cause. A recommended approach is to look at incidents in three time phases: Events leading up to the incident, the incident itself and the time immediately afterward.

Most causes can be traced back to failures within the safety management systems that deal with the four cornerstones of due diligence: information, instruction, training, and/or supervision.

An organization's incident analysis system should be reviewed periodically to ensure its effectiveness.

## For the Record

Date of Meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Finish Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting Leader: \_\_\_\_\_

In Attendance:


## It really happened...

An operator was loading a Bobcat machine onto a trailer. The attached forks were not lowered as he proceeded onto the ramp of the trailer.

Due to the incline of the ramp the Bobcat tilted backwards and flipped over.

No injuries to the operator or surrounding technicians resulted from the incident. However, the company issued a safety alert bulletin pointing out that "Reporting of near miss events is an important safety mindset that ensures key learnings can be shared to prevent similar incidents from occurring."

The bulletin reminded personnel that the

company was in the midst of a very busy construction and maintenance season but shortcuts should not be taken to finish a job quickly.

"It is important to keep safety as a Number 1 priority."

Specifically, the bulletin advised Bobcat operators to take all necessary precautions. These include calculating weight, forklift position and incline prior to loading and unloading of Bobcat units, and to make sure forks are lowered to balance the weight of the unit when unloaded.

**Note: *TalksZone* safety meetings are not intended to take the place of your own safety procedures. Always consult and/or review your procedures before attempting any work.**