

What is a Near Miss in the Workplace Really Telling You?

"What a heart-stopper – that could have been bad!"

"Now *that* was a close call."

Have you ever heard similar statements at work? Have you actually experienced a near miss while on the job?

A near miss is an unplanned event that doesn't result in injury or death, but could have.

Often these incidents – while they may leave you shaken, laughing or with a "good story" to tell when you get home from work – often are not reported. No harm done, right?

But by not reporting near misses, employees also are not doing anything to prevent more, potentially serious incidents from occurring in the future. Near misses occur every day in every industry, and most serious, catastrophic and loss-producing incidents are preceded by these warnings.

Develop a Near-Miss Program

Some organizations wait for losses to occur before taking steps to prevent them. But recognizing and reporting near misses can significantly improve worker safety.

In establishing a near-miss reporting system:

- Leadership must establish a reporting culture
- The reporting system must be non-punitive and anonymous
- An investigation must follow to identify the root cause and weaknesses in the system
- Investigation results provide the roadmap to improve safety systems
- Results provide opportunities for training, feedback and a commitment to continued improvement

Employee Participation is Vital

Employees are uniquely suited to provide information on workplace near misses. How can employers encourage workers to participate in reporting?

- Create policies and procedures that clearly explain near-miss reporting

- Make the reporting system easy to understand and use
- Promote a culture of reporting with the support of all managers and supervisors
- Train all employees on the reasons near-miss reporting is necessary
- Provide incentives for workers who report incidents

30 Near Miss Examples

Below you'll find 30 near miss examples that could apply to various industries. Use them as guides to determine when to report and how to describe an event. In each of these scenarios, you'll see that the event could have easily led to a preventable injury had the event played out to its logical conclusion.

Slips, Trips, and Fall Near Misses

1. A worker slips on condensation that had dripped onto the floor but doesn't fall (this time).
2. A worker trips over an unmarked step and falls without injury.
3. A trip occurs when a worker attempts to walk through packaging materials dispersed across the floor.
4. A fall occurs when a worker attempts to ascend an unstable ladder.
5. You trip and fall in a dimly lit space.

Risky Behavior and Horseplay Near Misses

1. You jump down to another level, like everyone else does, putting too much pressure on your back and knees when landing.
2. A worker slips off of a pallet jack while riding it down a warehouse aisle.
3. A co-worker attempts to quickly retrieve an item left on a steep roof alone, without fall protection.
4. A worker continues working while lightheaded and eventually faints.
5. Two workers roughhouse and make contact with a third worker.

Narrow Escapes

1. Your leg was momentarily caught between a pallet of materials and a support structure (no injury).
2. A worker's clothing gets caught in machinery; it tears before an injury is sustained.
3. A worker jumps out of the way moments before getting hit by a hot item being carried by another worker through a narrow walkway, narrowly avoiding severe burns.
4. A worker finds a live, damaged electrical cord that is lying in a pool of water before contact is made.
5. A 5-gallon bucket of paint falls from heights, landing close to a worker (without injury or property damage).

Working at Heights

1. While working on a third-floor roof, one worker throws an object to another, causing him to lose his balance in an attempt to catch it.
2. While working on a 55 ft. roof, you lean onto an unsecured skylight panel and fall but are caught by your protective gear.
3. A worker who is not wearing fall protection on a roof stumbles and slides.
4. Poorly maintained scaffolding begins to lean when workers ascend.
5. A co-worker sets up fall anchors and you notice errors before you begin working for the day.

Signage & Hazard Communication

1. An area of the workplace is under construction but employees weren't notified, so multiple workers walk through the area without taking proper precautions.
2. Two moving vehicles nearly collide at an intersection with low visibility.
3. You nearly come into contact with a harmful substance that had been temporarily stored in the wrong container.
4. You nearly touch an extremely hot surface due to a broken indicator light.
5. Due to missing signage, electrical work is nearly performed on equipment that requires lockout.

Equipment Operation & Maintenance

1. A worker operates a heavy trencher without checking for the presence of underground utilities.
2. A co-worker operating a skid steer near a trench causes a wall collapse while no workers are inside.
3. A worker attempts to manually clear a jam from a dangerous piece of equipment without cutting power to the machine.
4. A crane operator has a near hit with a worker.
5. A piece of poorly maintained equipment sparks; the sparks fall into flammable materials.

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