

DOS & DON'TS: Don't Ignore Near Misses



Near misses'such as incidents in which a worker could've been injured but wasn't'aren't occasions in which you should breathe a sigh of relief and then continue business as usual. Near misses are opportunities to address or eliminate safety hazards *before* someone gets hurt. Ignoring a near miss and failing to identify and address its causes can result in an actual safety incident'and liability for any underlying OHS violations.

That's the lesson a factory in Australia learned. An experienced worker operated an automatic core cutter, which cuts paper roll cores to length. While wearing a glove on her left hand to prevent blisters, the glove got caught under a spinning rod and her arm was dragged into the machinery. The worker's lower left arm had to be amputated as a result of the incident. About four years earlier, the same worker had been involved in a near miss in which her glove got caught by the shaft of the core cutter, but she was able to pull away in time and so didn't suffer any injuries. A supervisor was present during this prior incident and was aware that the worker's glove had gotten entangled in the shaft.

Despite the near miss, the factory didn't take any proactive steps to learn from the incident and prevent similar occurrences, such as developing a safe work procedure for operation of the core cutter and barring the wearing of gloves while using this equipment. In addition, the worker continued to wear a glove while operating the cutter. As a result, the factory was charged with and pleaded guilty to a safety violation. In fining the factory \$42,000, the Industrial Magistrate noted that it was significant that the factory 'failed to prohibit the use of a glove even after the earlier incident, which highlighted the serious risks associated with operating' the cutter while wearing gloves [Russell v. Leonhard Kurz (Aust) Pty Ltd., [2015] SAIRC 13, May 20, 2015].

Insider Says: OHS Insider has additional resources to help you properly respond to and manage near misses, including:

- Answers to 8 FAQs about Near Misses