

Seven Ways to Get Workers to Report Near-Miss Incidents



Occupational health and safety (OHS) directors appreciate the value of actionable information. They gather and use hazard assessments, injury, illness, and workers' compensation cost data to develop injury prevention strategies. And they base their strategies on this data. But there may be frequent blind spot in their analysis: Near-misses. Reviewing injuries that occurred isn't enough; you must also consider the injuries that almost occurred but didn't. Unfortunately, near-miss data is hard to capture. Here are some ideas for resolving this problem.

Near-Misses Are Prevention Opportunities Lost

Nothing is more frustrating than learning in the course of an incident investigation that the very same circumstances that caused an injury also caused previous incidents. You hear things like:

- "That guard has been loose for two weeks."
- "I slipped on that same spot yesterday." or,
- "That device has been malfunctioning for three days."

Had you known about these problems, you might have been able to take corrective actions to prevent the injury. The problem is that these incidents went unreported because nobody

actually got hurt.

Why Near-Misses Go Unreported

Workers would do themselves and their co-workers a world of good by reporting near-misses to the safety director. Common reasons they don't:

- They don't recognize that the event is an incident that should be reported even if there were no injuries.
- They don't want to get themselves into trouble for causing or reporting the incident.
- They don't want to "rat" on co-workers who caused the incident.
- They don't have time to report the incident or create the report they fear they'll have to write if they do report.
- They don't know how to report the incident or who to tell.

Six Ways to Overcome Worker Reluctance to Report Near-Misses

The starting point for overcoming reluctance is to educate everyone—managers, supervisors, and especially workers on the floor—on the imperative of reporting near-misses so that a red light in their heads goes off automatically whenever they witness one. All must understand that unless they're reported and corrected, the same conditions will likely cause future incidents. And if there is a next time, they might not be lucky enough to avoid amputations, broken bones, head injuries, or even fatalities. There are six other things OHS directors can do to get workers to report near-misses:

Implement a written policy requiring that all safety incidents be reported immediately.

- 2. Define reportable incidents as including not only actual injuries, illnesses, and property damage but also near misses.**
- 3. Clearly define near miss as events that don't result in but had the likely potential to cause injuries, illnesses, and property damage.**
- 4. Establish mechanisms and processes for reporting near-misses.**
- 5. Train workers on the reporting protocols and how to use them.**
- 6. Provide written assurances that reporting near misses will be appreciated and in no way result in any kind of reprisal, retaliation, discipline, or other adverse action.**