

TOOLBOX TALK #5

NEAR-MISS REPORTING

An employee may recount a story of a “close call” at work. He or she also may describe the incident as a “near collision” or “narrow escape”. All these terms refer to a near-miss. A near-miss incident is an event that, although not resulting in an injury, illness or damage, had the potential to do so.

According to a 2013 case study developed through an alliance between OSHA and the National Safety Council (NSC), near misses generally are the result of a faulty process or management system. However, a non-reporting culture can be corrected. Reporting near-misses can “significantly improve worker safety and enhance an organization’s safety culture,” OSHA and NSC state.



Best practices

Not sure where to start when developing a near-miss reporting system? OSHA and NSC offer best practices:

- Leadership buy-in is critical. Those at the top need to establish a reporting culture that reinforces the importance of identifying and controlling hazards at every opportunity.
- Employees should not be punished for reporting a near-miss. Consider allowing anonymity for workers reporting an incident.
- Always investigate a near-miss incident to determine how and why it happened, as well as how to prevent it from occurring again.
- Use the result of a near-miss investigation as an opportunity to improve your organization’s safety system.
- Recognize that reporting near-misses is crucial to preventing serious injuries and deaths.

Employee participation

A near-miss reporting system will not work without employee participation. To encourage involvement, OSHA and NSC recommend the following:

- Educate workers on why near-miss reporting is important. Be sure they know how to navigate the reporting process.
- Keep it simple. The reporting system should be easy to use and understand.
- Train new employees on the use of the reporting system.
- Do not let your near-miss reporting system fall by the wayside – actively communicate its importance to all employees.
- Regularly reiterate that your reporting system is non-punitive.
- If initiating an incentive program, be sure to avoid incentives that discourage reporting. A good incentive program will actively recognize the reporting of hazards.
- Celebrate your program’s success!