

TOOLBOX TALK #2

UNDERSTANDING AND AVOIDING NEAR MISSES

A roofing contractor foregoes fall protection because he finds it uncomfortable. Later that day, he slips and nearly falls off the roof of the two story building he is working on.

A project manager is reading his smart phone as he walks down the hall at his office and almost collides with a coworker



Although one case is more extreme than the other, both are examples of near misses – and both are preventable situations. A near miss is an unplanned event that did not result in injury, illness or damage – but had the potential to do so, according to the National Safety Council (NSC). The group recommends implementing a near-miss reporting system, rather than waiting for losses to occur before taking steps to prevent them from reoccurring. History has shown repeatedly that most loss-producing events (incidents), both serious and catastrophic, were preceded by warnings or near-miss incidents. These systems can help create an open culture in which workers feel responsible not only for their own safety, but also the safety of their coworkers. Near-miss reporting systems can also help capture data for statistical analysis, and can be considered to be a leading indicator of performance used in balance with other leading and lagging measures of performance.

Tips for success

For a near-miss reporting system to be successful, leadership must reinforce a culture that promotes identifying and reporting hazards, and then take action. The system needs to be non-punitive – avoiding punishment and the blame game – and anonymous, and reported incidents must be investigated to determine root causes.

Encourage participation

To help increase worker engagement in near-miss reporting programs, make the process simple. Look into using incentives that encourage reporting. A good incentive program rewards workers who report hazards. In contrast, a poor incentive is one based on a low number or rate of reported injuries. This type of incentive has been shown to suppress reporting and can lead to punitive actions that further undermine safety efforts.

Lastly, be sure to celebrate the success of your near-miss reporting process with employees.