A Near Miss is Not a Lucky Break (Close Calls)



Safety Talk

A near miss is a chain of events that very nearly results in property damage, serious injury, or death, but not quite. The official definition of a near miss is: “an unplanned event that had the potential to result in an injury or physical damage (but did not).”

A near miss is not a lucky break. A near miss is an indication of a problem, either systematic or mechanical, that has very real potential for hazard. It’s a red flag calling for change to ensure that a similar situation in future doesn’t result in worker injuries or deaths.

What’s at Stake?

A near miss can occur in virtually every industry. Many incidents of property damage, injury or death can be predicted by near misses. Engaging a near miss as a preemptive problem-solving opportunity is crucial.

A problem indicated by a near miss might involve damaged or broken equipment, such as frayed cords, broken ladder rungs, a non-functioning parking brake, ill-fitting machine guards, loose handrails, loose hinges or old PPE. The list goes on.

A near miss may also occur due to a procedural error. This could be the result of inadequate safety training, poor or non-existent communication, or failure of a worker to adhere to appropriate safety procedures.

An error may also occur due to simple carelessness, such as a dropped tool, or a shoddy packing or storage job.

What Can Go Wrong?

An office janitor was mopping an office hallway late one evening. Since it was late, the janitor was not worried about foot traffic in the area. He figured it was unlikely that anyone would be around, so he did not put up the appropriate “wet floor” warning signs.

While the janitor was mopping the tile floor out of sight of the elevator, a harried company CEO rushed out of the elevator doors and skidded across the newly mopped hallway, barely retaining his balance.

What Should You Do

If you nearly run into material, such as carelessly stored product protruding into an aisle or items stored so high that the pile could collapse, deal with the hazard or notify your supervisor before the next worker or customer to come along gets hurt.

Make sure you understand each near-miss scenario you encounter, including what went wrong, each possible outcome of the incident and how to address the hazards.

Be wary of how your co-workers conduct themselves and work together to prevent injury and safeguard one another from incidents. Compare your routines and habits with theirs and share tips.

Take responsibility for the equipment or machinery you use frequently. If this equipment or machinery causes you problems or appears to be broken, report it to your supervisor.

Ensure you understand and follow all safety procedures. If you want to review or brush up on your safety training, or if you are confused about a particular procedure, talk to your supervisor without delay.

Final Word

Seize the moment! Take close calls seriously, but more importantly, use them as learning opportunities to prevent incidents. In addition to being red flags, close calls are golden opportunities to prevent a near miss from turning into a direct hit.