Close Calls are Urgent Calls for Action



What’s at Stake?

A close call, also called a near miss or near hit, is an incident that might have resulted in injury, death or property damage, but did not. Often, people who have experienced a close call think about the incident as a lucky break, dust themselves off and get back to work without a second thought.

But, when you don’t handle close calls correctly, right when they happen, people can easily get hurt or killed later.

What’s the Danger?

Here’s one such example. A 43-year-old machine operator died when he fell into a metal shredder at an aluminum smelting operation. Scrap metal is loaded into the hopper of the shredder where the shredder then cuts the scrap into medium-sized pieces. Then the medium pieces are moved by conveyor to another shredder to cut the pieces smaller, and then into a bin from which the metal is loaded into a furnace.

At the time of the fatality, the victim was working at the main shredder line. A co-worker came through the area looking for the victim, but could not find him. Then the co-worker saw a pool of blood and clothing at the end of the shredder line. The victim had fallen into the shredder and was carried through the entire shredder line.

Sadly, there were warnings and close calls that were overlooked. One such event happened when a co-worker saw the victim lose his balance while standing on the ledge of the shredder while the equipment was running.

How to Protect Yourself

If you see or experience a close call, report it immediately, no matter how minor it may seem.

Here are 6 steps you can take to prevent or handle close calls:

1. Familiarize yourself today with how to report close calls/near misses to

your supervisor or manager. If you are unsure of the procedure, talk to your supervisor.
2. Don’t turn a blind eye if you see fellow workers exposed to hazards or performing their jobs in an unsafe manner. Talk to them about your concerns.
3. Notify your supervisor or manager immediately if you see any damaged or broken machinery or equipment.
4. Check your own worksite and equipment before each use, looking for hazards or any unusual situations.
5. Take steps on your own to evaluate your own work processes or practices. Are you properly following all safety procedures for the work you are doing?
6. If you witness or experience a subsequent close call after a hazard has supposedly been addressed, report it immediately to your supervisor.

In some industries, handling close calls correctly led to a two-thirds reduction in fatal incidents. So close calls don’t have to be negative events—in fact, they are some of our best opportunities to correct unsafe conditions.

Final Word

Reporting and following up on close calls immediately is a responsibility we owe to each other and to everyone who depends on us. It’s an opportunity to correct a hazard without anyone being injured.