

Before you begin

The intent of this discussion is to draw awareness to a valuable method of incident prevention. If you have a copy of your company's incident-reporting procedure, provide it. If not, begin with a copy of your accident investigation report for this brief discussion. Encourage employees to participate in the discussion.



Introduction

To introduce the topic of near-miss reporting ask the group if anyone has ever realized, after an incident, just how close they came to getting hurt. If the answer is yes, they probably were involved in a near-miss incident. These incidents, also known as near-hits or close calls, may seem to be lucky breaks when no injuries or property damage occur. Since they often go unreported they soon are forgotten.

What is lost then, is a free lesson in injury prevention. The time spent reporting and investigating near-misses can help prevent future incidents and potential accidents. For every reported accident there can be 15 near-miss incidents. That is why many companies require reporting and tracking of near-miss incidents with the same scrutiny as those involving an injury. The difference between a near-miss and an injury is typically a fraction of an inch or a split-second.

Definitions

Accident – An event resulting in injury, illness, and/or property damage

Near-miss/incident – An event that could have resulted in injury, illness, and/or property damage

Incident analysis – The process of determining the root cause of the incident, accident, or near-miss to apply to future prevention

Report forms – The accident reports, accident/incident report, near-miss report

Discussion

Why do many near-miss incidents go unreported? Many employers and employees may not identify them as a reportable occurrence. It is more often human nature that keeps us from using these lessons to improve the safety system. People may resist reporting for several reasons, including:

- They do not want to be blamed for problems or mistakes.
- They do not want to create more work.
- They do not want to be perceived as a trouble-maker or careless.
- They may not know the requirement to report.

Supervisors should encourage reporting near-misses. They do this by maintaining a positive approach to gathering information and avoid blaming individuals or groups.

Ignoring these incidents can lead to a greater chance of injuries, illnesses, or property damage. The ratio between the number of near-misses and injuries shows that for every 15 near-misses, there will be one injury. It is only a matter of time before a near-miss meets with the right timing and circumstance to become an injury. In other words, there are 15 missed opportunities to prevent an injury.

By focusing on identification and analysis of near-miss incidents, injuries may be less likely to occur. The goal is to implement corrective actions to prevent future occurrences that could lead to illness or injury.

Group activity

Ask if anyone has witnessed an incident that had the potential to cause an injury or property damage. If there is no response, have an incident prepared to present. Why did the event not result in an injury? What corrective actions have been implemented as a result of the near-miss investigation? Cite examples of corrective actions taken as a result of near-miss investigations.

What behaviors or conditions can cause a near-miss incident? For example:

- Failure to maintain or repair equipment.
- Removal of machine safeguards.
- Failure to keep walkways free of slip, trip, or fall hazards.
- Inadequate training or personal protective equipment.
- Not following or enforcing procedures.

What other information would be important to preventing future incidents? For example:

- Factors contributing to the near-miss incident.
- Corrective actions necessary.
- Responsibility for corrective action, date to be completed, and follow-up inspection.

What tools, actions, attitudes, or other things would make it easier to report and track your near-miss incidents? For example:

- The process assesses no blame.
- Individuals and groups are not used as examples.
- Forms are simple, available, and reporting is easy.
- Positive recognition for those who report close calls.
- Accountability for corrective actions.

Near-miss incidents cannot be ignored. The concept is simple: if near-miss incidents are ignored, valuable safety lessons are lost. If the causes of these incidents are not corrected, chances are good that an injury will result. If corrective action is taken on all close calls, injuries may be prevented. Report all near-miss incidents. It is a proposition you cannot afford to ignore.

Conclusion

Stress the importance of having a company procedure to report near-misses so that the opportunity to improve is not lost. The point of such an opportunity is to uncover the cause and not to place blame on any individual or group. Finally, implement corrective actions to prevent a reoccurrence or an escalation to an injury, illness, or property damage.

References

Websites

Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Incident Investigation

<https://www.osha.gov/dcsp/products/topics/incidentinvestigation/index.html>

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, Incident Investigation

<https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/investig.html>

Campbell Institute, Serious Injury and Fatality Prevention & Leading Indicators White Papers

<https://www.thecampbellinstitute.org/research/>