



Close Calls & Near Misses

When an on-the-job injury occurs, we know that a proper investigation can reveal the root cause of that injury. Then ways to prevent similar incidents can be devised and implemented to improve the overall safety of our workplace. Other sources we can study that provide critical information for improving safety programs are close calls and near misses. Reporting these incidents can lead to the correction of unsafe conditions or actions before an injury occurs. We need to stress this to employees about the importance of reporting all close calls and near miss incidents so that proper action can be taken to improve work conditions and prevent injuries.

Near Miss Objectives

- In order to learn from close calls, the incidents must be reported and investigated.
- Employees need to understand that the purpose of studying near misses is not to punish employees or assign blame; it is to improve workplace safety and reduce injuries.
- Reporting close calls leads to improvements in work areas and job procedures while allowing the correction of unsafe conditions before an injury occurs.
- Failing to report even a small incident allows hazards to escalate into more serious situations.

INCIDENT #1: A forklift driver backed into a storage rack, pushing the rack into the aisle on the other side. This close call went unreported. Then a material handler who was unable to see over his load collided with the rack in the aisle while taking the load to a storage area. Since no one else saw the incident and it had apparently caused no damage, the material handler neglected to report the incident. What he didn't realize was that the collision had punctured a container of lubricating fluid in one of the boxes on the storage rack.

By the time the next shift had arrived, the fluid had formed a puddle in the aisle way. An employee hurrying through the area walked right into the spill but managed to keep his balance. Assuming it was not his job to clean up the spill or report it, he left it as it was. Then a forklift operator, traveling too fast, swerved to avoid the rack and ran through the spilled lubricant. Sliding on the slippery floor, the forklift narrowly missed a group of workers. Fortunately, this was a close call, which could have easily caused a fatality. This incident was reported, and an investigation was started.

The near miss investigation revealed several contributing factors:

- Backing without checking behind the forklift contributed to the first forklift hitting the rack.



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- Exceeding safe operating speed contributed to the second forklift swerving around the rack and into the fluid.
- Traveling with an obstructed view contributed to the collision between the pallet jack and the storage rack.
- Not paying attention and being in a hurry contributed to a near slip and fall.
- Not reporting any of the three smaller incidents contributed to an escalation of hazards that resulted in the final incident.
- Had any of these incidents been reported, the problems could have been corrected before they could contribute to other incidents.

Safety Lessons to be Learned

- When operating moving equipment such as forklifts, pallet jacks and other similar items, make sure your vision is not blocked by the load.
- Always operate any moving equipment at safe speeds so you can avoid sudden turns or quick stops.
- When walking about the facility, always look before entering aisle ways and watch where you are going.
- Be aware of dangerous areas by obeying caution signs, checking mirrors and watching for slipping or tripping hazards.
- Take your time when traveling through the facility to be sure you arrive safely at your destination. Never run while at work.
- When safety hazards or unsafe conditions are discovered, correct or report them immediately. Don't put others at risk by assuming someone else will do it.
- Report close call or near miss incidents you may encounter.

INCIDENT #2: Scott is a plant employee responsible for loading rolled steel onto rollers and then into the feed line for processing. During one shift, he loaded a roll into the holder and then tried to feed it into the line as required. Having trouble getting the steel into the feeder, he figured the machine was out of alignment but decided to keep the line moving, to finish that shift's run. Thinking he could get it started by hand, he pulled the steel down toward the rollers. He climbed onto the side of the conveyor to get a better grip on the steel. Scott didn't notice that the apron he was wearing had come untied and continued to move with the steel closer to the feed rollers. Finally, the steel and his apron entered the feed rollers. Scott was pulled down toward the rollers, but fortunately he was able to get the apron over his head and get away from the feed rollers.

The near miss investigation revealed several contributing factors:



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- The conveyor was not aligned with the rollers, making it hard to feed the steel. This contributed to Scott's frustration, prompting him to force feed the steel by hand.
- Scott let his emotions overcome his good judgment about personal safety. His poor decision to climb onto the conveyor and attempt to hand feed the steel into the rollers was a violation of two of the company's safe work procedures.
- Wearing an apron near the moving machine was the final piece of the nearly fatal situation.
- In response to the investigation, the company requires adjusting the feed rollers monthly to prevent additional problems. Also, use of aprons is now prohibited within ten feet of the conveyor system and shirts shall be tucked in.

Safety Lessons to be Learned

- If the equipment you are operating is not working correctly, follow your company's procedures to have it adjusted or repaired.
- Never try to make the equipment work by performing unsafe acts such as defeating guards, climbing onto (or into) machines or placing your hands near moving parts.
- If you are qualified to service the machine, perform all steps in the required lockout/tagout procedure before beginning any repair.
- If you aren't authorized to service the equipment, report the situation to your supervisor so proper maintenance can be performed.
- If material needs to be loaded into moving parts or if jams need to be cleared, use assist devices that keep hands clear of moving parts.
- When working around moving parts such as rollers, gears, belts, or other pinch points, remove any loose articles of clothing that may become entangled. Keep long hair pulled back and restrained.
- Remember that staying safe at work is your responsibility. Don't let emotions tempt you into an unsafe act. Always stay in control and consider the safety of your actions.

INCIDENT #3 Rhonda works on an assembly line where job assignments change several times each day to reduce fatigue and strain. To keep from having to walk all the way around the conveyors to get to a workstation just on the other side of the line, employees would climb over a conveyor rather than walking to the nearest approved crossover. This had become routine for employees. Also, the shift supervisor had never warned them not to do it even though he had seen it done. One day Rhonda attempted to cross the line by standing on the side rails and step over, but she lost her balance, stepped onto the conveyor and fell hard on the rollers. Fortunately, an



alert co-worker hit the emergency stop button, shutting down the conveyor. Rhonda was helped off the line with no serious injury.

The near miss investigation revealed several contributing factors:

- Failing to enforce the company's rules against crossing the conveyor, the shift supervisor contributed to the employees' unsafe behavior.
- Repeating the unsafe act without incident contributed to employee complacency about the danger of the moving conveyor.
- The failure of both supervisors and employees to recognize the shortcut as being unsafe contributed to it becoming a standard part of the work routine.
- As a result of the investigation, the company is adding conveyor crossings at locations more convenient to employee workstations.

Safety Lessons to be Learned

- Supervisors must enforce the company's safety policies. Safety rules that aren't enforced don't help anyone and lead to an escalation of unsafe acts.
- Employees must recognize and avoid unsafe acts. If you think what you are doing may be unsafe, check with your supervisor or safety manager for the proper way to perform the task.
- Don't take chances with your safety. When in doubt, find out.