By the Numbers: Near Miss and Safety Awareness

DID YOU KNOW?

Near misses make up more than half of the incidents that occur in the workplace.

OSHA defines a near miss as an incident in which no property was damaged and no personal injury was sustained, but where, given a slight shift in time or position, damage or injury easily could have occurred. Near misses also may be referred to as close calls, near accidents, accident precursors, injury-free events and, in the case of moving objects, near collisions.

Near Miss reporting is a mine-field. Employees need options, as many as them. The key to the problem is not to look at it as "who is to blame but correct the problem" very few people are going to report a near miss if there is going to be a negative consequence to them."

People should not be punished for reporting near-miss incidents; instead, supervisors need to encourage their employees to feel comfortable coming forward to achieve a workforce that anticipates and identifies hazards before anyone gets hurt.

Research

Research exists that supports the claim that the safety climate of a workplace has a direct impact on the reporting of near misses. Researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison presented a study on near-miss reporting systems in March 2011.

Survey

The Researchers surveyed 108 employees at three chemical plants in the United States, examining the relationships among employees' perceptions of various factors that are part of the safety climate of the plants and their near-miss reporting behavior.

Results

Subjects who perceived a more positive management culture towards safety were more willing to report near misses. A correlation between employees' willingness to report and their perception of organizational factors, such as their perception of top management commitment, support of peers and their comfort in reporting issues to their supervisors."

KEEP IN MIND

If an unsafe act or condition causes a near miss and it isn't corrected, the likelihood of a serious injury or incident occurring goes up. The danger is not from the near miss itself, but from:

- Not acting in the incident by not recognizing it as a near miss.
- Not following the correct reporting procedure.
- The relevant people not taking appropriate and timely action to remove the risk.

Hazards

- Staff not understanding what a near miss is.
- Inadequate reporting processes.
- Accepting the near miss was a lucky escape and taking no action.

Near Miss Program

Environmental, health and safety departments at five Fortune 500 companies, created the following steps for setting up a successful **Near-Miss Program:**

- Create a clear definition of a near miss.
- Make a written disclosure and report the identified near miss.
- Prioritize reports and classify information for future actions.
- Distribute information to the people involved in the near miss.

- Analyze the causes of the problem.
- Identify solutions to the problem.
- Disseminate the solutions to the people impacted.
- Resolve all actions and check any changes.

Other Steps:

- A bulletin board reporting from is one way to increase awareness of near misses.
- Workers fill out a simple form which gets posted on the bulletin board for all to see.
- Bring close call reports to your regular safety meetings. Have workers talk about how to prevent future incidents.
- Explain to your workers that the terms “close call” and “near miss” are used interchangeably. Ask them for their definitions of these terms and make sure everyone understands what they mean. Likewise, explain what is meant by “safety incident” which covers injuries and close calls.
- This is a good topic for a video. Get some volunteers together and stage a close call incident in your work area.