Near Misses – What's the Big Deal?

What's at Stake?

Near misses make up more than half of the incidents that occur in workplaces. A near miss is an unplanned event that did not result in injury, illness, or damage but had the potential to do so. A near miss needs attention, as they are a warning that conditions are right for a possible accident.

The two most common causes of near misses are *unsafe acts* like improper lifting; walking under an overhead load; not using proper personal protective equipment and *unsafe conditions* – such as poorly maintained equipment, oil or grease on floors, welding leads that have been laid in walkways, or trash and boxes that have been left in hallways.

What's the Danger?

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 on 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.

How to Protect Yourself

3 easy ways to stop a near miss from becoming actual injury, illness, or death

1. **Pay attention!**

    a. Recognize near misses are warnings.

    b. Letting a near miss go unreported provides an opportunity for a serious incident to occur.

    c. Correcting these actions or conditions will enhance the safety within your department and provide a better work environment for everyone involved.

    d. Don’t let yourself or your co-workers become statistics.

2. **Know what to report.**

    a. An incident where you did not hurt yourself, needs reporting because others may not be as lucky as you.

        i) You trip over an electrical cord stretched across a walkway, but you don’t fall.

        ii) You drop a heavy object but missed your toes…this time.

        iii) While working on a piece of equipment, you receive a shock, but are not injured.

    b. Report something you see that could be a risk or hazard – before it turns into a near miss.

        i) You see a trailing electrical wire.

        ii) The floor is wet from a leaking pipe.

        iii) You see a co-worker standing on the top step of a step ladder and overreaching to do his or her work.

3. **Know the reporting process.**

    a. Who to tell if something needs addressing urgently.

    b. What documentation is needed.

    c. What the follow-up process is, including how you will be notified of corrective actions.

Final Word

Recognizing and reporting hazards in the workplace is everyone’s responsibility. Doing so can reduce the number of workplace injuries, illnesses and deaths. New hazards often appear over time, after a policy, procedure or safety plan has been written. This means recognizing and reporting near misses is vital to keep the company’s hazard mitigation strategies up to date.