

## DON'T DISMISS THE NEAR MISS

**Question: What is a near miss?**

**Answer: A near miss is when an incident is narrowly averted and does not cause harm – it is the close call or accident that ALMOST happened.**

Near misses...we all have them and usually react with a quick sigh of relief. We then quickly move on and forget that they occurred. We think if we got away with a near miss and avoided a serious incident once; we will sail by the next time and the next.

However, this is a dangerous philosophy. If we fail to make necessary changes, something may happen, and then it is too late to avoid an incident. The implementation of workplace changes after an accident occurs is a re-active approach. Tracking near misses and implementing controls before an accident occurs is a pro-active approach.

An incident rate study\* conducted years ago found that for every serious injury, there are 600 near misses. If you consider that most of us have several near misses every day; these numbers prove that if near misses are dismissed, it is only a matter of time before a serious injury happens.

So, the simple solution is to reduce near misses, which will prevent accidents from occurring. A best practice that will impact your safety program is to implement a reporting system for dealing with near miss incidents. Here are the steps for an easy action plan:

1. Require each safety committee member to bring near miss examples to safety committee meetings for discussion
2. Identify root causes of near misses as part of safety committee meetings – also determine what are the unsafe acts and conditions that lead up to the incidents
3. Determine what can be done to prevent similar incidents in the future
4. Make changes to machines, processes/procedures, safety equipment, and unsafe behaviors.

Your employees should already know that they need to report all incidents to their supervisor, however, make sure that they understand near misses are no exception. Similar to a car's "check engine" light or a fever, a near miss is a symptom alerting you that something is wrong. So, do not ignore these warnings, but instead, view them as opportunities to prevent an injury.

\* Bird, F.E. and G.L. Germain, *Practical Loss Control Leadership*, Det Norske Verita, Loganville, GA, 1996.