

Phew that was lucky.....

Talking Health, Safety and Wellbeing. The weekly article to help you keep fit and stay healthy and safe in your place of work. This week's article talks about the need to report near misses.

We often go by the misconception that a lucky escape from injury or ill health from a work activity or as a result of damage to premises, plant or equipment was "just one of those things". As a result we don't do anything about the situations that caused them in the first place or informing anyone about it.

These types of incidents are called **near misses** and are as important as accidents and other types of incidents that we report and investigate. If we don't do anything about near misses we could increase the potential for more serious incidents, injuries or ill health which could have a significant impact on people, the reputation of the organization, and result in financial loss through fines and compensation claims.

Examples of near misses can include:

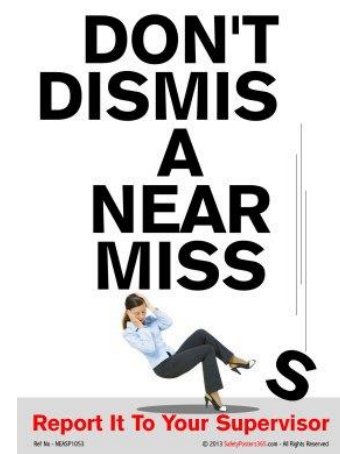
- a JCB coming into contact with water pipes or electrical cables without causing damage or injury
- an employee slipping on a spillage but not falling over and injuring themselves
- a door falling off its hinges narrowly missing an employee

Why do **near misses** occur?

Near misses can occur as a result of human error, damage to or failures of premises, plant and equipment as well as failures in work processes and systems of work.

Human error is a large contributory factor in why near misses occur. There are a variety of different reasons for human error: the main types are slips, lapses, mistakes and violations

- **Slips** are unintentional errors that occur from actions not being carried out as planned, normally as a result of unconscious thought or a lack of skill e.g. incorrect operation of equipment or a machine perhaps due to fatigue.
- **Lapses** are errors that occur from missed actions or oversights and are normally the result of being distracted or a lapse in concentration or memory. We can often get distracted by things on our mind, colleagues or by our environment.
- **Mistakes** are errors that occur from a failure in a work system or process. When things start to go wrong someone makes a decision they believe to be correct and in doing so makes the situation worse. These normally occur through a lack of knowledge and/or experience, or a lack of awareness of the consequences of their actions.
- **Violations** are errors that occur as a result of deliberate unsafe acts or conditions, e.g. taking a shortcut to finish the job quickly or interfering with safety devices on plant and machinery to allow work to continue. Often these become custom and practice.





Poor maintenance and the condition of premises, plant and equipment can cause items to become damaged, worn and fail which could result in an injury or ill health to employees, service users or young people.

Poor analysis of the hazards and risks associated with a work activity results in poor development of control measures and systems of work which can cause incidents, injuries or ill health to occur.

Why don't we report and investigate near misses?

There are several reasons why we don't report near misses:-

Managers don't consider incidents that don't result in injury or loss as significant and as a result don't bother to report or investigate them. They become anecdotes and we forget about them over time. As a result employees can think that reporting a near miss is pointless because nothing gets done. Sadly sometimes near misses are considered common place and frequent that they become part of daily work life and don't get looked at.

Employees don't want to report near misses through fear of consequences e.g. disciplinary action, embarrassment about the incident or being labelled as a "jobs worth or tell-tale".

People's lack of awareness of the severity of the incident or the potential consequences can cause them to ignore incidents and not report or investigate them.

Peer pressure not to report near misses because it generates more work e.g. incident reports and an investigation.

Managers and supervisors don't know how to report and investigate near misses correctly.

What can we do to prevent near misses, improve reporting and investigation?

The 17th century poet Alexander Pope was right when he said "To err is human, to forgive is divine". Managers should encourage employees to report near misses without fear of consequences or embarrassment.

Managers and supervisors should familiarise themselves with how to report near misses correctly using the SHE Assure incident reporting system, investigate them proportionately to identify why they have occurred and put in control measures to prevent them from reoccurring again.

We need to ensure we carry out regular maintenance and inspection of premises, plant and equipment to prevent damage or failures and the potential for injury or ill health.

Ensure we carry out suitable and sufficient risk assessments of our work activities and develop safe systems of work that will ensure employees work safely.

By changing people's attitude to reporting and investigating near misses we can reduce the likelihood of them occurring.

Creating a culture that does not tolerate reckless behaviour but recognises that competent colleagues can make errors or develop unhealthy norms, such as taking shortcuts or poor work routines, is key to identifying the potential for a dangerous incident to occur, enabling measures to be taken to avoid injury or ill health.

For more information on how to report near misses and other incidents using the SHE Assure incident reporting system please go to the [Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing pages](#)

Why not try our Quiz below on whether or not you should report a near miss.....

Incident	Report as a Near Miss
1. A pupil was walking down the corridor when the school hall door came away from its hinges and fell narrowly missing the pupil?	Yes or No
2. Whilst driving a ride on lawnmower on wet grass it overturned causing the driver to cut his head?	Yes or No
3. An employee was soldering which caused a release of smoke setting off the smoke alarms but did not cause a fire or injury?	Yes or No
4. A employees hand slipped whilst using a jigsaw causing a cut to the hand?	Yes or No

[Check your answers](#)

How did you do?

4 / 4 100%	Well done, you're a near miss expert
3 / 4 75%	Not too shabby, you're getting there
2 / 4 50%	A reasonable try, but more work required
1 / 4 25%	Not so good, you're a near miss novice

So finally don't be afraid to report a near miss, it may prevent someone from getting hurt in the future and make your work area safer for everyone.