

Garmong Construction Services					
<i>EMPLOYEE SAFETY POLICY HANDBOOK – Near Hit Reporting</i>					
Last Revised:	February 7, 2012	By	Douglas Mahurin, MS, CSP	This Copy Printed:	2/7/2012 6:25:00 PM

Near Hit Reporting

A **near hit** is an unplanned event that did not result in injury, illness, or damage – but had the potential to do so. Only a fortunate break in the chain of events prevented an injury, fatality or damage; in other words, a miss that was nonetheless very near. Although the label of 'human error' is commonly applied to an initiating event, a faulty process or system invariably permits or compounds the harm, and should be the focus of improvement. Other familiar terms for these events is a "**close call**", or in the case of moving objects, "**near collision**".

Most safety activities are reactive and not proactive. Many organizations wait for losses to occur before taking steps to prevent a recurrence. Near hit incidents often precede loss producing events but are largely ignored because nothing (no injury, damage or loss) happened. Employees are not enlightened to report these close calls as there has been no disruption or loss in the form of injuries or property damage. Thus, many opportunities to prevent the accidents that the organization has not yet had are lost. Recognizing and reporting near miss incidents can make a major difference to the safety of workers within organizations. History has shown repeatedly that most loss producing events (accidents) were preceded by warnings or near accidents, sometimes also called close calls, narrow escapes or near hits

In terms of human lives and property damage, near misses are cheaper, zero-cost learning tools for safety than actual injury or property loss.

- An ideal near hit event reporting system includes both mandatory (for incidents with high loss potential) and voluntary, non-punitive reporting by witnesses. A key to any near miss report is the "lesson learned". Near hit reporters can describe what they observed of the beginning of the event, and the factors that prevented loss from occurring.
- The events that caused the near hit are subjected to [root cause analysis](#) to identify the defect in the system that resulted in the [error](#) and factors that may either amplify or ameliorate the result.
- To prevent the near hit from happening again, the organization must institute teamwork training, feedback on performance and a commitment to continued data collection and analysis, a process called [continuous improvement](#).
- Near hits are smaller in scale, relatively simpler to analyze and easier to resolve. Thus, capturing near hits not only provides an inexpensive means of learning, but also has some equally beneficial spin offs:
 - Captures sufficient data for statistical analysis; trending studies.
 - Provides immense opportunity for "employee participation," a basic requirement for a successful EHS Program. This embodies principles of behavior shift, responsibility sharing, awareness, and incentives.
 - One of the primary workplace problems Near Miss incident reporting attempts to solve directly or indirectly is to try to create an open culture whereby everyone shares and contributes in a responsible manner. Near-Miss reporting has been shown to increase employee relationships and encourage teamwork in creating a safer work environment.

The search for proactive methods of providing a safe working environment has increased in the past few years. What better way is there to prevent incidents than by looking at events that just missed being an incident? Collecting near-hits, determining causes, correcting and communicating them could help reduce incidents and injury rates.

What stymies reporting?

So why isn't near-hit reporting more prevalent in industry? One reason is fear of reprisal and embarrassment. The

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perceived organizational message may not be positive towards near-hits, treating the incident as a mistake and not as an opportunity to take proactive steps to prevent injuries and promote safety. A near-hit can be very personal. Often an employee is relieved to be okay and doesn't want to think about what could have happened.

In addition, and very important, if near-hit incident reports are collected and the information is not evaluated and disseminated and no action taken, workers will become discouraged and stop sharing. A near-hit form may be inconvenient to fill out, not readily available, or there may be no time allotted to complete it. But, again, near-hits provide an excellent opportunity to learn proactively from what some consider free lessons or just old-fashioned good luck.

However, this process must be built using a positive approach with a goal of creating a safe culture where employees feel comfortable sharing not only safe behaviors (practices), but also unsafe behaviors (practices). This works in concert with safety rules and disciplinary actions being in place.

SHARING principles

Steps to successful integration and acceptance of near-hit reporting can be summed up in a word,

Simple: Often, companies design forms that are very detailed, complicated and time-consuming. By keeping reporting simple and narrative, and by allowing workers to use their own words to describe a situation, employees are more likely to share. The key is to learn what types of near-hits are occurring, not necessarily all the details involved in the occurrence.

Hourly Employee Team: Successful safety processes employ Hourly Employee Teams. A review team is very helpful in building trust and involvement. Finding safety champions in the hourly workforce to develop a team to promote, review, solicit and develop solutions is a very effective way to encourage reporting of near-hits.

Anonymous: At least initially, it is best to keep reporting anonymous. This applies to relating personal events as well as those witnessed happening to others. NO NAMES, just the event. Until employees are confident that reprisals will not occur from sharing near-hits, anonymity will be more conducive to participation. Once a process is in full swing, the importance of anonymity may dwindle and employees will share openly.

Respond: Once near-hit reports start being submitted, it is important to respond to them. They should be communicated to the entire workforce for their review and input and then acted on. Solutions should be explored and shared.

Involvement: Everyone should be involved. One method of encouraging hourly employees to participate is for management and supervisors to share their personal near-hits (we all have them whether at work or at home).

Non-punishing: Management and supervision must make a commitment that punishment will not occur when near-hits are reported. This is a sure way to deter participation. It must be remembered that the goal is to improve safety, and by sharing near-hits future incidents could be avoided.

Give Positive Reinforcement/Recognition: It has been documented over and over again that positive reinforcement/recognition motivates people to discretionary effort. Workers will do more work than expected if they are recognized for their work. As near-hit reports are submitted it should be communicated to the workforce that this is a good thing.

Building trust

In the words of a great teacher/philosopher: *Tell me and I will forget, Show me and I will remember, Involve me and I will understand.* And adding our words: *Recognize me and I will do it again and again.*

Trust is a building process. Positively reinforced participation will provide a foundation to build a sound structure (culture) of sharing.

You don't need to wait for a serious injury, incident or death in order to analyze what changes need to be made in working conditions or safety practices. Rather, use an incident or near-hit as an opportunity to find and eliminate causes of problems that could result in serious injuries, death or property damage.

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It can never be over-emphasized: Employees are a company's greatest asset and resource. To achieve safety success, do whatever you can to encourage them to share their experiences, knowledge of their jobs and recommendations.

Near hits should be completed and forwarded to the Safety Director at the main Terre Haute office, or sent through email to ddmahurin@aol.com. Results from near hit reporting will be shared with the work crews through tool box talks.