

Agilus Health & Safety Bulletin

Near Misses: Preventing Accidents Before They Happen



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What is a “near miss”?

A near miss refers to a situation in which an accident or unwanted event almost occurred, but was avoided due to luck, chance, or timely intervention. In other words, it is an event that was very close to becoming an actual incident, but was averted at the last moment.

What is the danger?

Near misses serve as warning signs that something is potentially hazardous in a process, task, equipment, or work environment. However, they are frequently overlooked, unreported, or left unaddressed. Neglecting these signs may put you and your colleagues at risk of experiencing:

- catastrophic equipment failure,
- fires and explosions,
- chemical spills and environmental disasters,
- severe injuries or even death.



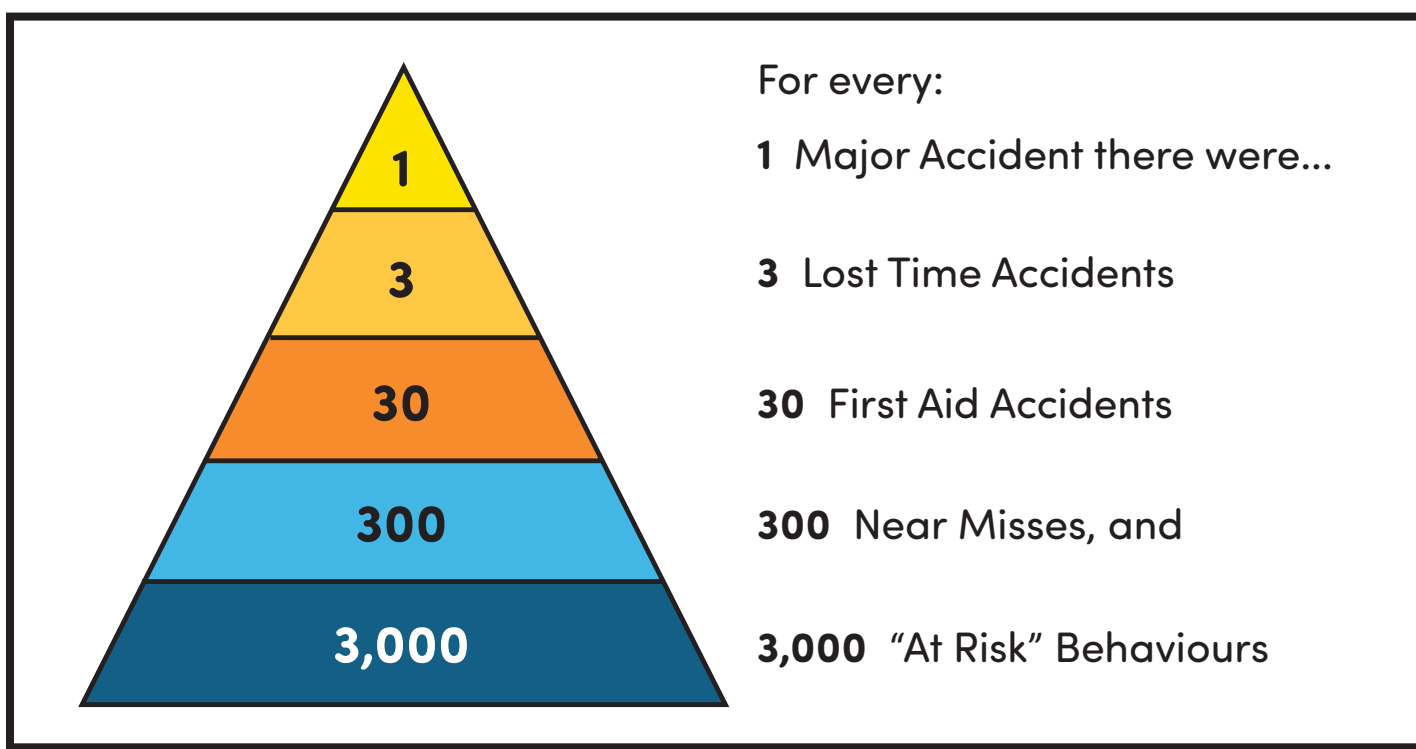
How to identify near misses?

Was there an incident that almost happened, but didn't, or an event that occurred but no damage was done? Many incidents could have been much worse if they had not been narrowly avoided, and often these incidents could have been prevented if the factors contributing to them were identified and controlled. If you had to breathe a sigh of relief after an incident, you witnessed a near miss.

Protect yourself and others

To safeguard yourself and your colleagues, the most effective action you can take is to speak out. Report any near misses that you observe or that occur to you. Once you identify a near miss, it should be reported immediately, preferably in writing, by the person who witnessed it or by a supervisor who received a verbal report from someone else.

Near misses should be handled similarly to other hazards: by investigating, prioritizing, and correcting them. It is crucial to recognize the significance of near misses and take the necessary steps to manage and prevent them from recurring.



Why is reporting near misses important?

Identifying and addressing safety issues is critical to avoiding future accidents and incidents. Near misses provide valuable information that can be used to implement preventative measures and improve overall safety in the workplace. Near misses could be signs of larger safety problems that require attention, such as:

- Poor housekeeping
- Poor work area layout
- The need for an ongoing maintenance plan
- Faulty work procedures or equipment
- Insufficient training in safe work practices and procedures

It is crucial to take a proactive approach in investigating and correcting these issues to ensure the safety and well-being of all employees.

Benefits of communication and control of near misses

Conducting a thorough investigation of a near miss can help identify the root cause and determine the priority level for further action. Sometimes, there may be multiple contributing factors, both immediate and underlying. An immediate cause can be an unsafe condition, such as a mechanical failure, or an unsafe action by an employee. An underlying cause can be something like a missing machine guard or a crowded work area.

If the investigation reveals that the near miss was significant enough to require preventative measures, possible actions may include:

- Eliminating the hazard's cause
- Reducing the potential hazard level or degree of risk
- Installing safety devices
- Putting up warning signs
- Implementing new safe work procedures
- Increasing worker awareness of the hazard, for example, through safety talks

By taking appropriate preventive measures, the likelihood of similar near misses occurring in the future can be reduced, ultimately improving overall safety in the workplace.

How to prevent near misses?

Developing hazard awareness is crucial for preventing incidents from occurring. Workers can play a vital role in minimizing near misses by inspecting their work areas daily for unsafe conditions and taking prompt corrective action if feasible.

Following proper near miss reporting procedures is a key component of building a positive safety culture. This has been demonstrated to enhance management-employee relationships and reinforce the importance of teamwork in maintaining a safe and healthy workplace.

DID YOU KNOW?

April 28 is a very important date in the world of health and safety. The day is recognized globally as “World Day for Safety and Health at Work” and in Canada is also recognized as the “National Day of Mourning.”

Never miss reporting a near miss!

Have questions regarding this bulletin, or workplace health and safety?

Contact us at: safety@agilus.ca

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