Compliance Made Simple Presents:

Take 10... Effective Safety Committee Meetings in about 10 Slides

Topic of the month: Near Misses
First Things First:

Document Your Meeting Per Your States Requirements

**Washington**

Meeting documentation - W

**Oregon**

Meeting documentation - O

**Montana**

Meeting documentation - M

**Alaska & Idaho**: There are currently no federal and/or state-specific requirements for safety committees in these states.
What is a Near Miss?

A Near Miss 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. A faulty process or management system invariably is the root cause for the increased risk that leads to the near miss and should be the focus of improvement. Other familiar terms for these events are a “close call,” a “narrow escape,” or in the case of moving objects, “near collision” or a “near hit.”

Examples:

- A forklift brushes the bottom of a storage rack column. The operator drives off. The racking wobbles but doesn’t fall and shows no sign of damage.
- An office employee walks in front of a forklift operator while arriving to work in the morning. The forklift operator slams on the breaks. They narrowly miss their co-worker.
- A forklift operator is loading a truck when the load shifts and crashes to the ground. No one is injured, but the product on the pallet is damaged.
- A customer slips on some fluid that had leaked from one of your forklifts. The customer falls in your warehouse, but is not injured.
Why Near Miss Reporting Matters...

Recent studies estimate that for every 1 Major Injury (e.g. Fatality)...

• There are 600 near misses (property damage possible but no physical injuries); and

• 300,000 unsafe acts (could be an at risk behavior, an unsafe condition, or a combination of the two).

• While a near miss is an event that does not result in injury, illness, or damage - it has the same potential to as an accident that does.
Read and discuss: Why “Potential” Matters

By focusing on outcomes in determining our safety decisions, we often miss important information showing that a high potential for serious injuries may exist.

Consider the following scenario and three different outcomes:
An open unit of 2x8’s is stored up high potentially faulty yard racks and while working below one of the pieces falls and:

• Outcome 1: Narrowly misses your employee
• Outcome 2: Scratches the arm of your employee requiring only a Band-Aid.
• Outcome 3: Strikes your employee in the head requiring them be hospitalized overnight.

In this example, we have the exact same level of potential for an injury, yet three different outcomes.

So what happens if we take the traditional approach of looking at the outcome in making safety decisions?

• If the serious injury in outcome 3 were the result, we would likely to do an investigation. During our investigation we find out that some of your employees have been concerned for years about the stability of several bent arms on the racks. This leads you to fix the bent arm and update your safe storage policy to require a metal band be put around large loads stored in the top rack.

• But... If outcomes 1 and 2 were the result, we would probably make no measurable changes, nor engage in an in analysis of the risk posed and the best ways to fix it.

Benefits of focusing on potential, not outcomes

Moving away from reacting to outcomes and instead looking at potential will have several key benefits to your operation, including:

• Allowing you to focus your resources, giving you more value for the time you invest in safety;
• Producing more valuable indicators as to the risks that exist at your facility;
• Studies show that employees are far more likely to buy into a “safety culture” when they see management focusing on safety measures with the highest potential for injuries.
**Best Practices: Establishing a Near Miss Reporting System**

- **Investigate near miss incidents** to identify the root cause and the weaknesses in the system that resulted in the circumstances that led to the near miss.

- **Leadership must establish a reporting culture reinforcing that every opportunity to identify and control hazards, reduce risk and prevent harmful incidents must be acted on.**

- **The reporting system needs to be non-punitive and, if desired by the person reporting, anonymous.**

- **Use investigation results to improve safety systems, hazard control, risk reduction, and lessons learned. All of these represent opportunity for training, feedback on performance and a commitment to continuous improvement.**

- **Near miss reporting is vitally important to preventing serious, fatal and catastrophic incidents that are less frequent but far more harmful than other incidents.**
Steps for Creating a Successful Near Miss Program:

1. Create a clear definition of a near miss.
2. Make a written disclosure and report the identified near miss.
3. Prioritize reports and classify information for future actions.
4. Distribute information to the people involved in the near miss.
5. Analyze the causes of the problem.
6. Identify solutions to the problem.
7. Communicate the solutions to the people impacted.
8. Resolve all actions and check any changes.
Idea: Conducting a Near Miss Training Session

When a near miss occurs, consider calling a safety meeting to discuss what actually happened, what could have happened, and ways to ensure it doesn't happen again. It is a chance for an employer to hear firsthand from an employee what he or she thinks are safety hazards within the workplace.

Here is a list of questions for employers and employees to discuss when talking about near misses that actually occurred in the workplace:

- Was the worker using unsafe practices?
- Was the worker careless because the tasks were too repetitious?
- Was the work violating safety practices?
- Were conditions unsafe?
- Did the worker have proper lighting?
- Was the worker taking shortcuts?
- Is the worker accident-prone?
- Was the "near" victim authorized to be in that work area?
KEY Takeaways

• Incidents occur every day at the workplace that could result in a serious injury or damage.

• A near-miss program may help prevent future incidents.

• One problem that companies face with near-miss programs is employees' fear of being blamed after reporting a near miss.

• Employers need to make the process of reporting a near miss as easy as possible.
Resources:

OSHA Accident/Incident Investigation: Tips & Tools

NSC: Near Miss Reporting Fact Sheet

Near Miss Safety Training Video (14:19)

WA L&I: Accident Prevention Program Guide

OR Near Miss 1-Page Bulletin