

VLCT PACIF Loss Control Guidance

Using Near-Miss Incidents to Inform Safety

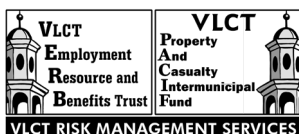
Most risk-minded employers are on board with investigating and analyzing **actual** injuries and other losses to help prevent similar claims in the future – but there are many more incidents that do not result in injury or other loss and can nonetheless inform an alert person about important workplace hazards. Every “near miss” or “close call” could have resulted in actual damage if circumstances had been slightly different.

Learning from these incidents can help an organization in many ways. Over time, it is likely that fewer injuries will occur, which is good for the organization’s bottom line. In addition, employees may come to feel more valued not only because their workplace is actively kept safer, but also because their input is noted and taken into account, which is good for overall morale.

Creating a structured system for reporting and following up on near misses is not difficult, especially in conjunction with the other key safety program components (management commitment, an active safety committee, good control and monitoring of workplace hazards, and effective safety training for employees). The three main activities are recording near-miss incidents when they occur, analyzing each one in a focused way, and taking measures to correct their underlying causes. A specific policy and an easy-to-use reporting form will go a long way toward successful implementation. Getting employee buy-in and maintaining it with publicized and/or visible follow-up will establish a positive feedback loop.

Steps for Implementing a Near-Miss Reporting and Follow-Up Program

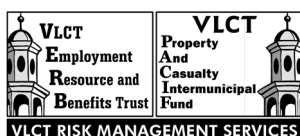
1. Develop your organization’s definition of a near miss.
2. Create a form especially for reporting near misses. An easy method is to adapt an accident investigation form to focus more on describing the events that led up to the incident and specifying the location, other observers, time, date, actions that were being performed, tools in use, and other relevant information.
3. Determine a procedure that will work within your organization for how an employee is to report a near miss and by whom the reports will be reviewed, analyzed, and addressed. Safety committees can certainly perform at least some of these functions, with skilled oversight.
4. Create and enact a policy that: explains the reasons for the program; names the form to be used to report near misses; outlines how incidents will be reported, reviewed, and analyzed; and specifies who is responsible for issuing responses or corrective measures developed as a result of the analysis.
5. Be thoughtful and thorough in communicating the near miss policy and its associated procedures to employees. Their understanding and participation are crucial to the program’s success.



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- At a minimum, we suggest rolling out the program with an explanatory memo to department heads who will in turn communicate the information to their subordinates. Thereafter, be sure to include the near miss policy in every new employee orientation and annual refresher trainings.
 - To energize the new program, underscore its importance, and encourage employees to recognize and report near misses rather than ignoring them, it can be very helpful to provide a small incentive. For example, anyone who submits a **valid** near-miss report could qualify for a monthly (or quarterly) drawing for a minor prize such as a \$25 gift card or a free pizza. A simple, low cost “perk” can really help spark interest and engender participation.
6. Communicate successes and when solutions are implemented. It is great to “advertise” the fact that employee “x” provided a near miss report that resulted in some change in process, equipment, etc. that prevents injuries.

As always, please contact your PACIF loss control consultant for help as you develop the most effective procedures and policy for your organization’s size and operations. If you have questions or would like more information, please email us at: losscontrol@vlct.org or call 800-649-7915.



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