



The Arizona Municipal Risk Retention Pool

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Does your Near-Miss Program Measure Up?

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. It simply means that a serious accident almost occurred. Someone trips over a pallet, but doesn't fall. Two forklifts almost collide at a corner. A tool is dropped, but toes are missed....this time.

Only a fortunate break in the chain of events prevented an injury, fatality or damage. Although human error is commonly 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". The often misunderstood phrase is so-called to stress that not only had things gone remotely off course towards danger, but they had actually only "barely missed" catastrophe. For instance, commercial airliners are considered dangerously close if they are less than one mile apart. If they pass at a quarter mile apart or less, this is a "near-miss" because they were extraordinarily near each other when they missed collision.

In a speech earlier in 2010, OSHA's Deputy Assistant Secretary told safety professionals that their near-miss incident reports should significantly outnumber their actual incidents; otherwise their incident investigation programs are probably ineffective. So, how does your near-miss program measure up? Do your near-miss reports significantly outnumber your incidents? Ideally, of course, you don't want either close calls or incidents. But, if your employees are reporting incidents, then chances are there are close calls or near-misses happening as well, at an even higher rate

Statistics tell us that for every 300 near-misses, you will potentially encounter one serious injury, 10 minor accidents and 30 incidents of property damage. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), there are at least 4 million work-related injuries each year. If we multiply each injury by 300, the results show 1.2 billion near-misses annually.

Look at the Figures - Watch out for the Small Things

If you reduce the number of near-misses, probability tells us you will then reduce the number of injuries that happen. It's also important to watch out for the small things – the "tip of the iceberg" principle. The few problems you do see are probably a fraction of the problems you don't see below the surface. Follow up on close calls and unusual circumstances; these can point to underlying problems that, if not addressed, could lead to serious problems.

For further information, please contact Nancy Graves-Green, Luis Nieves or Dan Saban at Southwest Risk Services, 602-996-8810.