

8.5 Near Misses

Near misses should be investigated or trended when the potential consequences are large enough. In order to request an investigation of these near misses, the organization needs to know about them. To get near misses reported, the organization needs to specifically define what a near miss is and address the barriers to getting these near misses reported.

8.5.1 Factors to Consider When Defining Near Misses

When considering whether to investigate an incident as a near miss, the following factors should be considered:

- What could the consequences of the incident have been? Would the consequences have been more severe if:
 - The circumstances had been slightly different?
 - It had not been detected so early?
 - The external conditions, such as the weather, were slightly different?
 - If a less experienced, but competent, person had been performing the task?
- Is the incident considered part of “normal” operation? If so, an investigation may not be appropriate. Should the incident consequences be considered an acceptable risk?
- Is the risk associated with this incident well understood? Is the risk associated with the incident acceptable? If a decision has been made that the risk from this incident is acceptable or tolerable, then an investigation would not result in any significant changes.
- Are adequate safeguards in place to protect the workers and the public against these incidents? If adequate safeguards are already provided, then an investigation would not result in any significant changes.

Some of these criteria will be difficult to assess before an investigation is performed. The best judgment will have to be made based on the limited information available. Some investigation effort may be required just to determine the answers to these questions. The criteria should be reassessed as additional information becomes available during the investigation. If the investigator determines that the incident did not have the potential for a large loss, then the investigator may make the decision to terminate the investigation at that point.

8.5.2 Reasons Why Near Misses Should Be Investigated

Near misses share the same causal factors and underlying causes as accidents. By investigating near misses and correcting their underlying causes, other near misses and accidents can be prevented. Near misses cannot be investigated if they are not reported.

8.5.3 Barriers to Getting Near Misses Reported

There are numerous barriers to getting near misses reported. In most cases, near misses are only known to the individuals involved in the incident, and the chance that they will “get caught” is small. Therefore, in effect, these individuals have the option of reporting the incident or keeping it to themselves. There are many factors that could discourage them from reporting. An organization will have to deal with these barriers to be effective in getting the incidents reported and subsequently investigated. The following paragraphs describe typical barriers that organizations encounter.

Fear of Disciplinary Action

Employees are concerned that they will be punished for reporting an incident. Punishment can range from being fired to getting undesirable shifts to receiving disparaging comments from supervisors.