Near Miss Accidents

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A near miss incident on jobsites is traditionally defined as one that leaves no injuries, no property or equipment damages, and also little or no evidence that it even occurred. As a result, a near-miss incident can be easily ignored. However, when reported and acted upon, near misses enable early intervention, and are great opportunities to improve organizational safety performance, according to Near Miss Reporting — a Missing Link in Safety Culture, a peer-reviewed feature in the May issue of the American Society of Safety Engineers' (ASSE) journal, Professional Safety.

Over the years several studies have shown that near-misses greatly outnumber serious accidents involving fatalities, injuries, or property damage. For example, a 1993 study by Health and Safety Executive researchers found that for every lost time injury more than three days in length there were 189 non-injury cases. Yet many organizations and their employees remain resistant to near-miss reporting.

"We want to develop a culture that doesn't wait until someone is injured, but identifies the risk before it happens," explained the article's author Mike Williamsen, Ph.D., CSP, who added that it is important to develop a safety culture that engages all employees.

"We have to engage people on the front line to eliminate personal risks."

Referring to near-miss reporting as a "personal risk assessment," Williamsen offers several solutions to overcoming the barriers to reporting near-misses that can be put into place to achieve what he calls a culture-based safety system: define expectations that all employees report unsafe conditions or perceived risks; provide employees with safety training; provide measurement for how near-miss reporting has improved safety performance; and recognize and reward employees and crews for proactive safety actions.