Reporting the Close Call

A close call or 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. Other familiar terms for these events are "close call", or in the case of moving objects, "near collision", or near hit.

What can happen when we ignore close calls in the work place? A close call is our opportunity to identify an unsafe condition or a hazard and correct it before someone is seriously injured. It is important to report all close calls and near miss incidents so that proper action can be taken to improve work conditions and prevent injuries.

Consider this scenario:
A service professional noticed a bent rung on the step ladder he used to complete some attic work. The ladder rocked a little as he climbed (close call?). Since he was at the site already, he used the ladder that day and was not injured and returned it to the storage facility without tagging the ladder or reporting the condition.

A few days later another worker took the ladder to a job site and used it to access a suspended ceiling in an office. He noticed that the ladder sat unevenly on the floor and tilted a little when he climbed it (close call?) but he was in a hurry and near a wall so he wasn’t concerned with the tilt. He returned the ladder to storage that afternoon.

The next morning, the maintenance guy at the office used the ladder to quickly change a bulb in a ceiling light in the office. When the ladder buckled, he and the ladder fell and landed on another employee seated at a nearby desk. Both he and the other employee were seriously injured.

There are a number of reasons for not reporting close calls.
- We are embarrassed to admit the circumstances
- We might find it is too much trouble/time to report it
- Reporting the incident might get one of our co-workers in trouble
- Reporting an incident might ruin our safety record, causing the loss of an incentive

It is extremely important that all close calls or near misses be reported and corrective action taken. “Why? You now have a “crystal ball” to see the future and to take corrective action and make your workplace safer. We have all had experience with close calls in our everyday lives. The best thing we can do is to pay attention to them and learn from them.

Of course, none of these reasons matter when you consider that reporting a close call might save a co-worker from serious injury. When an accident occurs and someone is injured, chances are someone else knew that the hazards existed. Someone else probably already had a hunch that the potential existed for product splashing your face from that new dispenser. Take the time to fix or report potential problems before they become accidents.

When investigating a near miss, look for possible causes including:
- Poor equipment condition or maintenance
- Not wearing personal protective equipment or missing PPE
- Inadequate or missing machine guarding
- Lack of, or poor, training and supervision
- Lack of procedure enforcement