The value of integrating near miss reporting in the risk management system

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According to the National Safety Council (NSC), a Near Miss is an unplanned event that did not result in injury, illness, or damage – but had the potential to do so. NSC further describes a Near Miss as an unplanned event that did not result in injury, illness, or damage – but had the potential to do so.

Many companies do not report near misses. Safety managers may resist reporting for a number of reasons, including:

- They do not want to be blamed for problems;
- They do not want to create more work (I’m busy enough already – sounds familiar?);
- They do not want to be perceived as a troublemaker or be blamed for “wasting valuable time”.

Many safety managers do not realize that near miss reporting may be a great tool which can be used as a leading indicator and can prevent injuries and damages to property and environment. Without clear communication about the risk of near misses becoming serious incidents the management may view these programs and activities as a lower priority. On the other hand, risk-centric organizations act upon risk rather than hazards through the use of near misses reporting incorporated in their risk assessment process.

During his trip to Italy, the author observed the following activity. Two employees lifted a heavy box and placed it on a mechanism designed to elevate the load to the fourth floor. The load was not secured and had the potential to fall and cause a serious injury to the worker at the base of the lifting system. Please refer to the digital image below.
Notice the worker below the heavy box in Fig.1? What if the material in the box had shifted outwards? Did I mention the area around the construction site was not secured? As the load is elevated to the fourth floor, two workers are reaching out to unload heavy boards. Notice the workers unloading heavy boards in Fig.2. What is one of them loses balance and drops the board? Usually, the construction site will have some sort of perimeter barrier to keep people from walking into a potentially dangerous construction zone. Installing a fence around the construction site alerts people that they are not supposed to be in an area.

No one was hurt in this situation. However, the workers (and tourists) experienced multiple near-miss situations – any one of which could have led to a serious injury or even death. One of the smaller boards fell to the ground and luckily did not hit the worker at the base of the lifting mechanism. Very often, such near misses go unreported and are not further analyzed. The difference between a near miss and a serious injury or a fatality is often a fraction of an inch (centimeters in this case) or a split second of time. Such hazards should be addressed as soon as possible, but they still should be reported to safety managers so they can make note of it. By discussing such near misses and hazards can raise awareness for construction workers to notice other hazards that should be reported to a safety manager. OSHA it is important to record and
investigate near-misses to identify weaknesses in the safety and health management system (SHMS) that could possibly lead to an injury or damage. Various near miss reporting forms are used in companies that recognize the importance of incorporating near misses analysis in the risk management process. In fact, near miss reporting is incorporated in OSHA’s Employee’s Report of Injury Form found at: https://www.osha.gov/dte/grant_materials/fy11/sh-22224-11/3_Accident_Investigation_Form.pdf In addition, OSHA strongly encourages employers to investigate all incidents in which a worker was hurt, as well as close calls (sometimes called "near misses"), in which a worker might have been hurt if the circumstances had been slightly different. (OSHA Incident investigation)

Safety professionals should become proficient in this practice, and not be afraid to report and analyze near misses.
References:

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