

S a f e t y M a t t e r s

Learn From Near Accidents

When you're driving down the highway at a pretty good speed and another car pulls out in front of you, it's necessary to hit the brakes or execute a quick maneuver to avoid an accident.

Chances are that you'll be pretty hot under the collar over the other driver's action, and you'll run your hand over your forehead to remove the perspiration.

But if you're smart, you won't let anger overpower your safe driving habits, and you'll make a mental note that you should be more alert and watch for cars approaching the highway from side roads. This could save your life next time.

Close calls or near-accidents on the job should be converted into safety precautions. A near-accident is an indication that something is wrong. It's a warning. A machine isn't operating correctly, materials aren't stacked properly or someone has done something that is unsafe.

When you're driving and you notice a red light glowing on the dashboard, you know that your engine is overheating or that there's another problem. Even a simple headache signals trouble in the body, though it may be minor.

Now let's consider some typical accidents that could have been avoided if the close call warning had been heeded.

A shop employee stumbled over a two-by-four and fractured an ankle. A janitor tripped over a loose floor tile and fell against a metal guard rail. After slipping on some trash and grabbing a metal file cabinet in an attempt to break the fall, the cabinet landed on the falling secretary. An injury resulted to a machine operator when a hi-lo struck the machine being operated.

It's pretty obvious that the proper handling of near-accidents could have prevented the real thing from happening in the cases just mentioned. The two-by-four in the aisle and loose tile or trash on the floor probably caused other employees to step aside to avoid tripping or even caused them to stumble. And how many near misses did the hi-lo operator have with the machine? Chances are there were several.

However, in all of these cases, no one paid any attention to the warnings. Nothing was done to correct the situations and accidents resulted.

It's not hard to recall accidents that you've had. You may still have the pains or scars to remind you. If you are burned at an early age, you don't need a slap on the wrist to remind you to be cautious from that point on. But as we've noted, a near-accident is often forgotten without any benefits resulting from the experience.

How can we turn a close call into a contribution to safety? There are several ways and maybe some of you are already using them. First, we have to think safety and become concerned over near-accidents.

The next step is to correct the situation and remove the hazard that caused the near-accident. If you can't handle it routinely, then report it to your supervisor. In fact, near-accidents should be reported regardless of the action to be taken in. This gives your supervisor an opportunity to get a line on potential problems and to make plans for the overall security of his employees.

There's at least one good lesson to be learned from every near-accident, and in many cases there may be two or three. So don't discount the value of reporting close calls and correcting hazardous situations.



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