NEAR MISS REPORTING

## EQUIPPING YOURSELF FOR THE UNPLANNED

NEAR MISS REPORTING

With near misses happening every day in the workplace, it is very important to encourage employees to consistently take them serious regardless of their potential for personal injury and property damage. Learning from these near misses will make the workplace a safer and healthier environment.

THE VALUE OF NEAR MISS REPORTING

HEINRICH'S TRIANGLE

- Small number of deaths
- Medium number of injuries
- Large number of near misses

If you've done any health and safety training, you've probably come across Heinrich's triangle. The number of layers have evolved over the years, but the basic idea is that since there are a very small number of fatalities in the workplace, if we only ever investigated them it would be a long time before we learnt any lessons. There are more injuries in the workplace than deaths, so learning from these provides more opportunities for learning. However, if we really want to make our workplaces safer and healthier we should be looking at the much larger number of near misses and hazardous conditions.
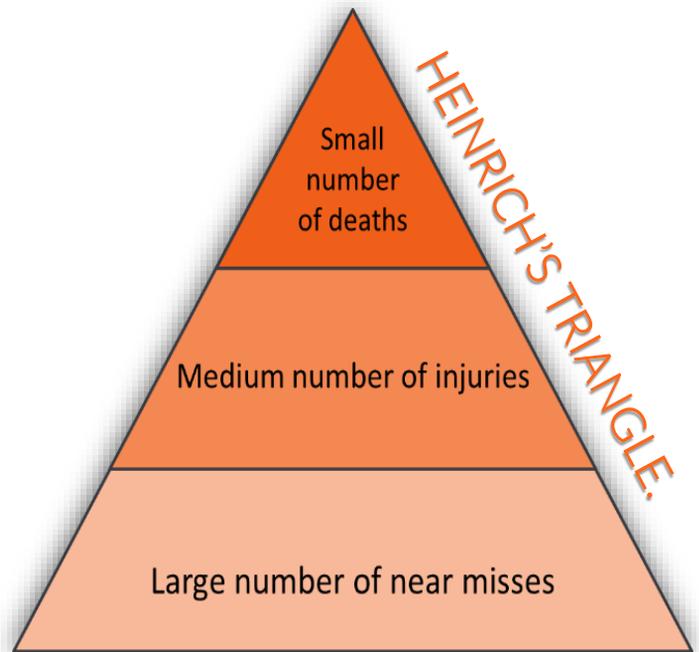
What is included in the bottom layer of the triangle causes some debate. The HSE define a near miss as "an event that, while not causing harm, has the potential to cause injury or ill health." It is useful to expand our reporting and investigation to include not just "events" but unsafe conditions. If there is a wet patch on the floor it is an unsafe condition – the event that caused it might be unknown until it has been investigated, but nevertheless, the unsafe condition should be reported. The HSE also suggest reporting "undesired circumstances" giving the example of an untrained nurse handling a heavy patient.

Other terms are used across industry, including "near-hit", "near loss", "close shave", "close call" or "narrow escape." For our purposes, we will use "near miss" to include events, conditions and circumstances that could have led to injury or ill-health.

Recording and investigating your near misses will provide you with an opportunity to fix problems before injuries occur. If someone reports the frayed carpet that nearly tripped them up, a repair can be made to prevent the accident in which someone actually trips.

Between 1993 and 1998 there were eight reported occasions where trains passed the same red signal, but arrived safely at their destinations. Some drivers were cautioned, others retrained, but no action was taken to improve the siting of the signal. On 5 October 1999 one more train passed the same red signal, hit another train and 31 people died, and another 400 were injured.

Frayed carpets and poorly sited warning signals, along with missing fire extinguishers, leaking plant and damaged equipment should all be reported – and those reports acted on.

Where the triangle is sometimes misunderstood is in thinking that the numbers at each level are fixed, and that any near miss will tell you about any fatalities. But frayed carpets only tell you about housekeeping, not about red signals. Investigating near misses related to slips will tell you nothing about how to prevent an explosion, something BP discovered after 15 people died, and over 170 were injured in the Texas City refinery explosion in 2005.

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THE VALUE OF NEAR MISS REPORTING

The key then is not just to ask staff to "report all near misses" but from your risk assessments, identify which near misses you need to keep an eye on. If you are concerned about people falling down stairs, consider why they would fall down the stairs. Do you need people to report spillages on the stairs, or perhaps report each time they witness someone walking down the stairs carrying a hot drink and using their mobile phone? If you are concerned about work high up on scaffolds, there might be no obvious near misses to report – someone falls, they die.

Instead, consider the barriers to people falling, and report when these fail – for example, inadequate scaffolding or failures to wear harnesses or restraints where these are required.

If you understand your hazards, reviewing near miss reports and the related risk assessments will give you opportunities to put things right before you have serious injuries – or worse. The HSE support this approach, saying that "learning the lessons from what you uncover is at the heart of preventing accidents."

PRACTICALITIES OF NEAR MISS REPORTING

Traditional near miss and hazard reporting systems were paper-based. Forms were completed, looked at, left at the bottom of in-trays, and near misses investigated when someone had the time to do it. Sadly, even when incidents were investigated, the findings were not always incorporated back into relevant risk assessments or work methods to prevent reoccurrence.

However, accidents still happen where safety managers are told afterwards – "yeah, we knew there might be a problem" and yet no one thought to let the right people know. Let's consider some of the obstacles to reporting those things that people might think are mundane – but which could have serious consequences if left unchecked.

Many larger organisations now have computer-based reporting systems, allowing all staff to make a report which can be tracked through investigation to actions required. Many of these allow other documents, including photographs to be attached. For significant events, these work well. Once on the computer, an appropriate manager can look at the details, visit the location, ask questions and recommend actions to take. All this can be tracked, and the computer can automatically send out reminders if actions aren't followed up.

PRACTICALITIES OF NEAR MISS REPORTING

Let's take an example of the ineffective and effective method to reporting on certain obstacles.

Ineffective Method	Effective Method
Jack notices a damaged stair and decides to report it	Jack notices a damaged stair and decides to report it
Jack tries to remember to report it	Jack takes a photograph of the stair on his phone
Jack tries phoning the health and safety advisor, but there is no answer	Jack completes the short form on app and includes the photograph
Later, Jack finds a paper incident report form, completes it, and puts it in the internal post	App sends report to relevant person within minutes of problem observed
When the health and safety advisor is back from annual leave, she finds the form and passes it to the facilities manager to investigate

The facilities manager goes to the wrong location and can't find the problem. Or maybe someone has sorted the problem by now? | The relevant person gets the notification (it's a property matter, so can be sent directly to the facilities manager, copied to the health and safety advisor). She uses information provided to investigate, including visit to the location |
| Jack's colleague falls when his heel catches the damaged step... | Sue decides on the immediate action needed to fix the problem – a short term diversion to allow a quick fix, and a call out for a longer term fix.

A note is made on the online risk assessment and related method statements / audits of any updates needed which the health and safety advisor is prompted to review |

What Jack needs is a way of capturing the situation on his phone, adding a few details and having that sent directly to the person who can look into the concern. And since his phone has GPS and a clock, it could automatically send the location and time reported without his needing to add this information.

Jack's report can be received instantly, with a notification sent to Sue, the facilities manager. Sue takes a look at the stairs, considers the risk and decides to divert people to a parallel staircase until a temporary repair can be made, and books in a maintenance visit for the next day. The unexpected damage might affect the probability of a fall estimated in the risk assessment, so she flags this up for the next review, and adds a visual check of the stairs to the weekly housekeeping audit checklist.


If all this can be done without wading through folders of risk assessments and piles of checklists, wouldn't that make the job a lot easier?

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engage
BY EFFECTIVE SOFTWARE

ENGAGE

Effective Software are delighted to announce the launch of their brand new mobile app – Engage. The Engage app supports the capture and view of Hazards, also commonly referred to as near misses. Using the app, anyone can now quickly capture Hazard information including description, classification and associated images.

Taking the example of Jack and Sue on the previous page, Engage would allow Jack and Sue to take the necessary effective steps to report and take action on the hazardous damaged stair. See screenshot.
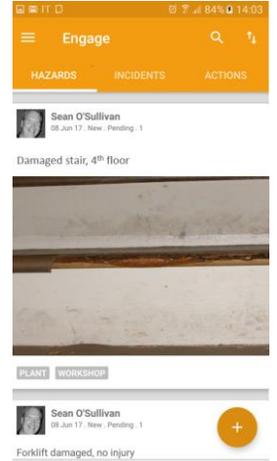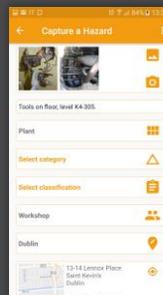
TRANSFORM YOUR WORKPLACE SAFETY IN 4 SIMPLE STEPS

ENGAGE

Allow every employee to positively engage with health and safety.

Report & View Hazards/Near Misses
Quickly capture Hazard information including description, classification and associated images and location.

ENABLE

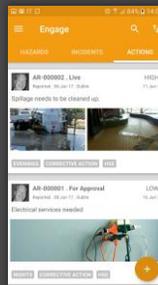Enable every employee to be an integral part of your safety system.

Work offline and online
Keep every employee connected to your safety system, wherever they may be.

EMPOWER

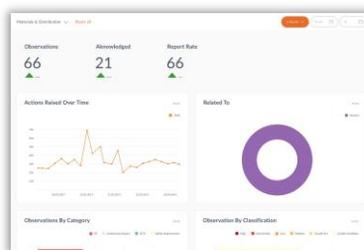Empower every employee with the right safety information to make better decisions.

Easy to use
Capture and share imagery, locations and custom categories across your safety system.

ENJOY

Inspire every employee to enjoy being part of a positive safety culture.

Actionable insights
Shine a light on your business to get actionable insights to improve H&S.

REQUEST A DEMO OF ENGAGE

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