



SAFETY BULLETIN

June 2008

Report Close Calls - It's Your Responsibility

A worker spotted his partner side-grinding without wearing a face shield and reminded him that grinding wheels can disintegrate. About three minutes later, that's exactly what happened. Thankfully, the worker had followed his co-worker's advice and donned a face shield. He wasn't hurt.

Such incidents are typical examples of thousands of close calls occurring in workplaces around the world every day. It's been estimated that for every serious injury, there may be 600 close calls.

Letting unsafe situations slide without reporting them to your supervisor is like telling your co-workers: "I escaped with eight of my nine lives intact. Let's see if you can do the same." Imagine the guilt you would feel if a serious injury or fatality took place because the victim wasn't told of a potential hazard that you were fortunate enough to survive without getting hurt.

Close calls can be caused by a number of situations, some working in tandem. Here are a few examples:

- Poor machinery or tool maintenance.
- Failure to wear personal protective equipment.
- Inadequate machine guarding.
- Falling, tripping or slipping as a result of poor workplace housekeeping.
- Ineffective training and supervision.

Perhaps you experienced a close call or "near miss" today or this week without even realizing it. Did you step over a spill in the coffee room? Slips and falls are the third leading cause of disabling injuries in North America. Have you opened a door in your work area lately, only to discover someone else coming right at you? What if that person were carrying boxes or you didn't look up in time?

While it is the supervisor's responsibility to look at immediate and underlying causes for the incident and develop an action plan for prevention, it's your responsibility to report close calls. Working with your supervisor will ensure close call incidents are eliminated.

Does a spill in the coffee room have to be reported? Maybe not, but it would only take you 30 seconds to wipe up that spill. If there are strict regulations in your workplace when it comes to such duties or if you are not sure what the spill is, then yes - it is your responsibility to report this spill - no matter how small - to your supervisor. How about bumping into someone like in our second example? Perhaps your supervisor is unaware of this hazard. It needs to be brought to his or her attention to see if something can be done about it. Nothing can get done if it isn't reported.

After experiencing a close call the usual response is to dust yourself off, consider yourself lucky and go on with your work without reporting the incident. Safety has nothing to do with luck. A close call is a red flag warning you that something is wrong. Report all unsafe work practices to your supervisor.