

# Wow, That was Close!

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I'm sure that you've said this a few times before in your life. Most of us had the experience of coming close to being seriously injured more than once. We've probably forgotten as many of these events as those we can remember.

It is interesting to watch individuals who have narrowly escaped injury. They usually laugh at their slim escape from fate. Somehow these events invoke humor. Perhaps it is the feeling of beating the odds or an appreciation of survival that causes this amusing response. When these events occur at work they are simply "part of the work-day." If dramatic enough, they may serve as a lunchtime story. If minor, they may be forgotten by the time the roach coach rolls on site.

These events are small treasures, which can be used to improve your safety programs; but often they go unclaimed, left to dissolve from memory. These incidents result from activity or physical risks in the workplace, attempting to

warn us of a potentially more serious future. Left to wisp away in the wind -- the risks remain poised for their next victim. Investigation of near-misses (more appropriately called near-hits) is an unexploited opportunity in many organizations.

It is human nature to focus on outcomes of risks rather than risk itself. An individual who climbs a muddy ladder with a smooth-soled shoe slips and falls to the ground seven feet below. The soft mud absorbs the fall with no injury result. A co-worker laughs and work continues. A week later, a co-worker climbs onto a rolling scaffold which is just three feet above the ground. With casters unlocked, the unit is rolled by grasping to overhead structures. A wheel hits a floor opening, throwing its occupant to the ground. Unfortunately a large wrench serves as the landing field for this worker's head. Serious disability results and extensive investigations are conducted. Both of these situations represent serious risks, but only one is investigated.

Focusing on risk rather than injury outcomes will allow organizations to proactively improve their level of safety. Effective investigation of risk can dramatically improve an organization's safety performance. Many companies, in error, assign incident investigations to safety coordinators, rather than supervisors. Others fail to give supervisors the training they need to conduct effective investigations. Most accident reports I read are incomplete and simply ineffective. Inferior investigations will result in futile corrective actions. Very few organizations have effective systems, which capture, investigate and correct risk.

On May 18, ABC will be hosting a course on investigating accidents. This program will make supervisors more effective at tasks which improve organizational safety. Safety coordinators will obtain advanced skills on proper investigation approaches while organizational leaders will generate ideas to improve company systems. The skills we will review are applicable to investigation of a wide variety of construction issues. This program hasn't been offered at ABC previously, so don't miss this opportunity to elevate your organization's safety program to the next level.