Brown & Brown

WHITE PAPER

Reporting Near Misses in the Workplace

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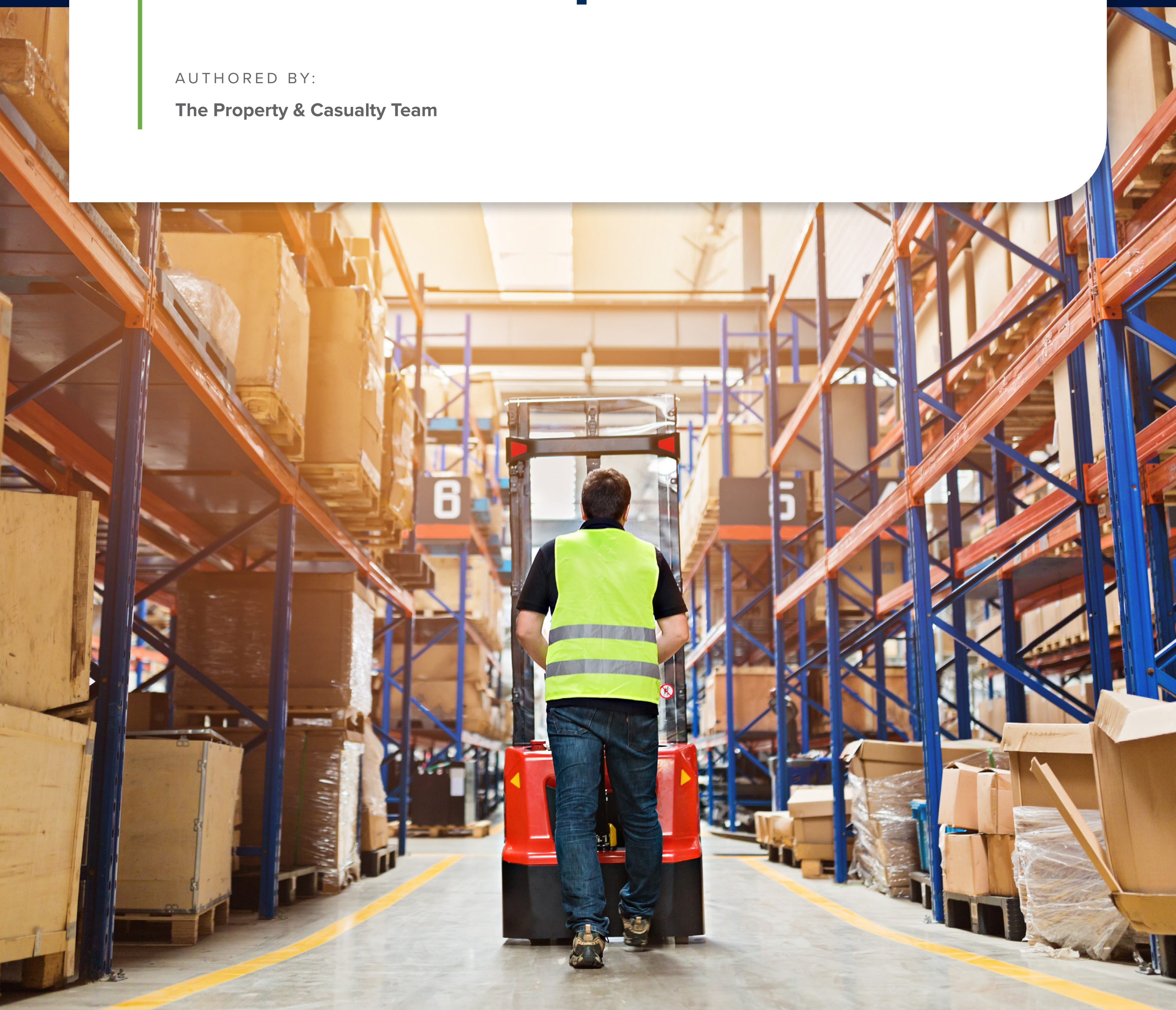


For every ten severe injuries and one fatality, there are 600 near misses – things that almost went wrong but didn't.[1]

The United States Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) strongly recommend reporting and investigating these "near miss incidents," though many companies fail to do so. Whether you didn't realize the need for reporting or don't know where to start, looking at how others successfully implement near-miss reporting procedures can provide helpful insights on how to begin your program. This white paper will discuss how organizations can manage near-miss programs, including challenges and effective strategies.

Near-miss reporting begins with safety systems in place and a culture of proactive disclosure of safety concerns. When an organization manages its injury experience and OSHA recordable incidents and is ready to add leading indicators to its data tracking and trending, the natural progression is to introduce near-miss reporting. Most safety professionals agree that a facility or site audit would uncover at least one near-miss condition or scenario during the workday. Translating that to the workforce is where the challenge lies, as many personnel needs help understanding how their organization defines a near miss.

1 It Starts with Culture

When a company and its employees understand the value of safety and are proactive about maintaining a safe workplace, near-miss reporting can become routine.

A program's branding and terminology can vary from organization to organization, but no matter how you present it, it should reflect your company culture. Using terms like "good catch" can encourage employee reporting of near misses by focusing on the positive. However, your employees must understand what a "good catch" means.

75%

of all accidents are preceded by one or more near misses[2]

2 Train Your Employees

Educate your personnel on how to recognize which incidents to report. Near misses can seem like an abstract concept, which can lead to a breakdown in communication. To you, a potentially dangerous situation is a near miss. To the employee, it may be just part of the job.

Help personnel understand what you expect of them by providing examples of events that constitute a near miss. Almost every day, employees see several categories of near-miss situations, such as improper equipment use and task hazards. Provide detailed descriptions of each scenario and clear examples outlining the incidents to report. Ultimately, reporting is about making everyone safer, a point which should be emphasized in all near-miss communications.

3 Get Organized

Once you have developed the definition of near misses and communicated those definitions to employees, the next step is to gather information. The good, old-fashioned safety suggestion box can be a great way of collecting near-miss reports anonymously. Other suggestions include mobile apps, intranet and internal technology for near-miss reporting and safety suggestions. Management and supervisors should have an open-door policy when it comes to safety. Workers should be able to report near misses to their direct supervisor without fear of repercussion.

Collect near-miss information the same way you would an incident in which an injury or property damage occurred. The information can be helpful whether a near miss happened three days or three years ago. Everyone can learn more about safety when near misses are investigated and adequately understood.

4 Take Action

The final and most critical step is to take action with your near-miss information. Treat a near miss like an incident to help identify root causes and corrective actions. If near misses are submitted anonymously, there may be some challenges in gathering details and investigating. However, it is still possible to better understand the situation – even if it means simple data collection. No matter how you address it, an organized system that reviews information is only effective when you take action.

Strategies for collecting near-miss information:

- Ask “who, when, where, why and how” questions
- In a training setting, ask, “what’s the craziest thing that’s happened to you at a job?”
- When individuals share stories and scenarios, point out what is appropriate to report as a near miss

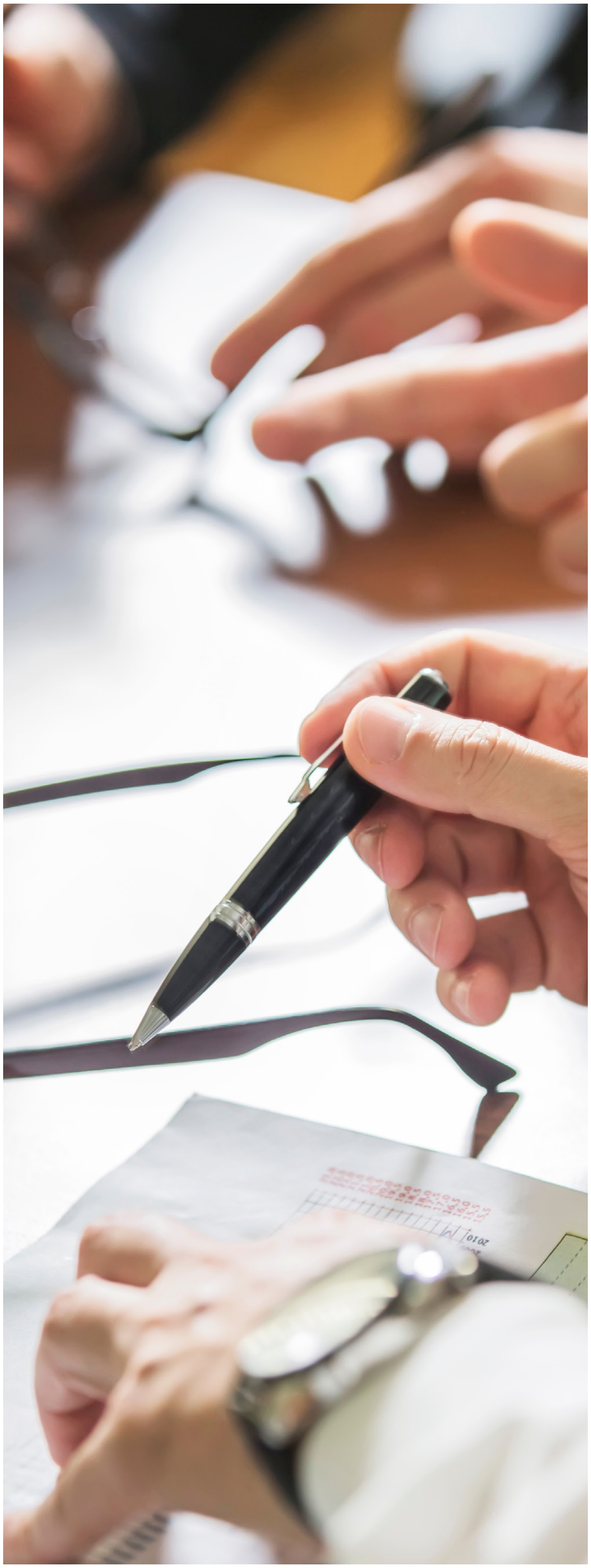
Programs that successfully implement near-miss reporting quickly see an uptick in data. As employees view the job differently and categorize more observations as near misses, reporting increases. Companies can use a range of near-miss reporting structures to set goals and track safety improvements. The structure can be formal, such as paper-based reporting with email action items, or informal, a simple conversation. There are also safety-tracking systems on the market that can easily incorporate near-miss observations into an audit program. The most sophisticated systems are fully automated and can digest real-time feedback.

This data can be leveraged to better understand when near misses are most likely to occur – perhaps a specific weekday or time. Based on the information your organization collects, specific work areas or behaviors can be understood, i.e., if the events happened in a rework (when a crew returns to the job site after completing their main scope of work) setting. Near-miss reporting connected to rework can point to easily addressed quality issues.

Companies that gather detailed and organized information have evolved their near-miss program from safety initiatives to quality control assistance. That evolution can give project supervision a holistic view of the job.

Increased reporting of near misses also helps companies more quickly make more specific and meaningful adjustments to safety procedures. One example comes from a company's anonymous safety suggestion box. An employee identified that there was no mechanism for conducting daily visual tool checks. Everyone understood that the inspection of tools was essential, but supervisors were not communicating to do so; they assumed each employee was doing it on their own. The firm acted because of the report, and now supervisors discuss the importance of daily visual checks of tools.

> **Safety should be a priority. Near-miss reporting takes a proactive approach to maintain a safe work environment by recognizing dangerous situations before they escalate.**



Near-miss reporting requires a lot of information from the ground floor to be effective. In turn, this data needs to be communicated across the entire organization once reported, followed by implementing corrective actions. The corrective actions often require time or purchasing, which are management decisions. It is imperative to verify management is on board with not only near-miss reporting but also the investigation and implementation of corrective actions that will follow. Beyond that, safety messaging and instruction are best received from an immediate supervisor.

However, no matter how well you plan, incidents can occur. Like near-miss reporting, Brown & Brown looks to the future to help reduce workers' compensation claims. Our assessments help identify high-risk behavior, and our quantitative analysis can help lower the number of claims and potential litigation.

[1] *University of Illinois Division of Safety & Compliance, Toolbox Talk: Near Miss*

[2] *Construction Business Owner, Near Misses: Identify and Eliminate Hazardous Workplace Conditions with Proper Training*

How Brown & Brown Can Help

Connect with our Brown & Brown team to learn about our knowledge in your industry, how we build our risk mitigation strategies and how we can aid your business in building a cost-saving property & casualty insurance program.

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