

CLOSE CALL REPORTING: CAPTURE YOUR LEADING INDICATORS

WHAT IS A CLOSE CALL?

Close calls are incidents that, under the circumstances, had the potential for more serious consequences. Leaders should create an environment where employees feel comfortable and compelled to report close calls, then use these incidents as opportunities to improve safety practices.

HOW DO YOU RECOGNIZE CLOSE CALLS?

*Statistics show that most injuries are caused by unsafe acts, although many employees don't recognize or admit that they commit unsafe acts. Leaders should teach employees to recognize unsafe acts before an injury takes place. Keep these ideas in mind:

Slow down to speed up. When an employee is rushed, he/she can be tempted to take a short cut that may lead to an unsafe act. Stay focused on your safety commitment.

Consider safety with every action taken. Teach your employees to avoid complacency about the hazards of their work area. If unsafe conditions are discovered, correct or report the situation right away.

Be accountable. Don't allow a poor attitude or unwillingness to address a situation to place others at risk.

Get involved. Reporting close calls and near miss incidents can improve the work facilities and job procedures. Be proactive in the process.

**Heinrich H.W., Petersen D., Roos N. Principles of Accident Prevention. 5th ed. McGraw-Hill; New York, NY, USA: 1980. Industrial Accident Prevention: A Safety Management Approach.*



Ignoring unsafe acts and close calls could lead to more safety incidents.

WHY DON'T CLOSE CALLS GET REPORTED?

Employees may not report close calls due to:

- Concerns about being blamed
- Time-consuming paperwork or becoming the subject of an incident investigation
- Looking accident prone
- Peer-pressure because of production expectations or a poorly designed incentive program
- Being labeled as a whiner
- Not being thanked for reporting the close call
- Believing it's easier to put up with the hazard than to fix it
- In extreme circumstances, being fired

HOW ARE CLOSE CALLS CAPTURED?

When creating your organization's Close Call Program, consider these elements to help ensure employees feel comfortable reporting unsafe incidents:

- Teach employees why close call reporting is important.
- Provide a confidential way for employees to report the close call.
- Ensure there is no fear of retribution against employees who report close calls.
- Recognize and reward those who come forward.
- Focus on building organizational intelligence:
 - Identify opportunities to improve.
 - Document your findings and modify your processes as warranted.
 - Clearly communicate findings to the whole organization.

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CLOSE CALL REPORTING: LESSONS FROM THE AVIATION INDUSTRY

RECENTLY, the commercial airline industry experienced a rash of “near miss” safety incidents including the following:

- A FedEx 767 nearly landed on a Southwest 737 that was cleared for takeoff while the 767 was nearing the runway in bad weather in Austin, Texas.¹
- A Delta 737 aborted takeoff at JFK after an American Airlines 777 crossed onto the runway ahead of it.²
- A United Airlines 777 entered a nearly 8,600-feet-per-minute dive shortly after takeoff from Maui coming within 800 feet of the Pacific Ocean.³

What do these events have in common? They were “close calls.” No one was hurt. Because there was no damage or injury, does that mean we should ignore them? Of course not.

In response to these close calls, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Administrator Billy Nolen issued an FAA “safety call to action” — forming a safety review team to conduct a root cause analysis (RCA) to examine the aviation industry’s culture. Nolen recognized that taking action following these close calls was necessary to help reduce the likelihood of a catastrophe in the future.

“We are experiencing the safest period in aviation history, but we cannot take this for granted. Recent events remind us that we must not become complacent... [the safety review team will] examine the U.S. aerospace system’s structure, culture, processes, systems and integration of safety efforts.”

—Billy Nolen, FAA Administrator

https://www.faa.gov/sites/faa.gov/files/2023_02_14-FAA-Call-to-Action.pdf

CLOSE CALLS: KEY LESSONS FROM THE AVIATION INDUSTRY

- **Safety doesn’t care about yesterday.** Like many commercial airlines, your company might have a stellar safety record. But safety records are typically based on past events. Don’t rest on your accomplishments. Stay focused on today – here and now. Remember: good can be bad. Don’t allow yourself and your team members to become complacent.
- **Focus on the close calls.** The FAA did not wait for a major crash to occur before issuing the safety call to action. Treat the close call exactly as if it were a crash. Those who capture the close calls and take action can help prevent future incidents.
- **Know the enemies of safety.** Always be on the lookout for signs of complacency, lack of respect for safety processes, or undue production pressure. These can promote short cuts, leading to close calls and incidents.
- **Use safety failures as teaching moments.** The airline industry has established a culture where every mistake should be viewed as a learning opportunity. Employees are expected to self-report and participate in investigations. Those who fail to report hazards and close calls can put their co-workers and possibly the public at risk. Self-reporting must be mandatory in high hazard industries.

¹Mendoza, Jordan. “FedEx and Southwest planes that nearly collided were ‘less than 100 feet’ from collision, investigators say.” USA Today. February 7, 2023. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/airline-news/2023/02/07/fedex-southwest-planes-austin-near-collision/11204768002/>

²Newman, Andy. “Delta 1943, Cancel Takeoff: Wrong Turn Results in Near Miss at J.F.K.” The New York Times. January 15, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/15/us/jfk-planes-delta-american-faa.html>

³Hernandez, Joe. “A United Airlines flight took a steep dive to just 800 feet above the Pacific Ocean.” NPR. February 14, 2023. <https://www.npr.org/2023/02/14/1156783593/a-united-airlines-flight-took-a-steep-dive-to-just-800-feet-above-the-pacific-oc>