

# Near-Miss Reporting

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**FAME** ADVICE FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL PRACTITIONERS

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The *FAME Health and Safety Guides* are produced by the FAME Health and Safety Working Group to help provides more detailed practical advice to our members and for the archaeological sector.

## **FAME Health and Safety Guide 1: Reporting Near Misses**

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## KEY NOTES

- Encouraging near misses to be reported and learning from them is positive for the workplace culture of an archaeological business.
- Carefully categorising what is reported helps ourselves and others understand the health and safety standards in our business.
- High potential (HiPo) near misses should be investigated as thoroughly as a serious injury accident.

# 1 Introduction

When an incident happens, it does not always result in injury as the person involved may take action to save themselves or simply be lucky. It could be something wrong is spotted and put right before it causes a problem. These are often called near misses or unsafe situations (see part 3 for definitions).

Every workplace has its own hazards and near-misses can happen in any of them. While it is vital that action is taken if a hazard causes an injury, it is far better to act before someone is injured, and this is where the reporting of a near-miss comes in. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) believes that on average there are ninety near-misses for every injury. If these near misses are reported then that one injury may be avoided.

It may seem obvious that to report a near-miss could save someone being injured in the future, yet frequently near-misses go unreported. This may be because employees are simply unaware that they should report a near-miss or be unclear about the procedures. However, other reasons why the near-misses go unreported include:

- being afraid of being reprimanded for the near-miss or getting a colleague into trouble;
- too much paperwork involved in reporting;
- reporting will blot a clean incident record and there may be rewards on offer for maintaining it;
- the incident seems funny and not serious;
- a poor experience previously when reporting an incident.

It is important to create a workplace culture where employees feel comfortable reporting near-misses and the incident is treated as a learning experience, exposing some of the less obvious hazards, without negative consequences.

## 2 Legal

### United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, under RIDDOR (reporting of Injuries Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013) you need to report certain near-miss incidents which are classed as ‘dangerous occurrences’. Dangerous occurrences are certain, specified near-miss events. Not all such events require reporting. There are 27 categories of dangerous occurrences defined in the regulations.

In practice the most likely reportable dangerous occurrences relating to archaeological works might be:

- plant or equipment coming into contact with overhead power lines;
- rupturing a live gas pipe whilst excavating
- structural collapse
- exposure to asbestos

Further HSE guidance on these [dangerous occurrences](#) is available.

### Republic of Ireland

In the Republic of Ireland, accidents and dangerous occurrences are required to be reported to the Health and Safety Authority (HAS) in line with the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Reporting of Accidents and Dangerous Occurrences) Regulations 2016 (S.I. No. 370 of 2016).

The HAS has a guidance document that explains why accident and dangerous occurrence reporting is required, what is reportable, what is not reportable, who should make the report and how the report should be made:

[https://www.hsa.ie/eng/Publications\\_and\\_Forms/Publications/Safety\\_and\\_Health\\_Management/Accident\\_and\\_Dangerous\\_Occurrences\\_Reporting.pdf](https://www.hsa.ie/eng/Publications_and_Forms/Publications/Safety_and_Health_Management/Accident_and_Dangerous_Occurrences_Reporting.pdf)

While not as applicable to archaeology The Chemicals Act (Control of Major Accident Hazards involving Dangerous Substances) Regulations 2015 (S.I. No. 209 of 2015) (the ‘COMAH Regulations’) requires additional reporting requirements for certain incidents such as explosions or the uncontrolled or accidental release of any dangerous substance.

## Near-misses

Recording non-reportable near-misses is **not** a statutory requirement in either country. However, doing so and using the information provided is good safety management practice. Addressing uncontrolled hazards can prevent near-misses and addressing near-misses can prevent serious injuries.

## 3 Definitions

The CITB GT700 toolbox talk refers to near-misses as *‘an incident that nearly resulted in an injury or damage’* and draws distinction with an unsafe condition which it refers to as *‘something with the potential to cause harm.’*

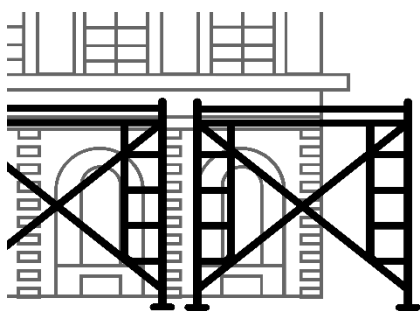
GT 700 does not address unsafe actions or omissions. It is positive to consider unsafe acts/omissions as honest mistakes that we can learn from and not a disciplinary matter.

National Highways defines a near-miss as *“an event that, whilst not causing harm, has the potential to cause injury or ill health”* And they separately define undesired circumstances as *“a set of conditions or circumstances with the potential to cause injury or ill health.”*

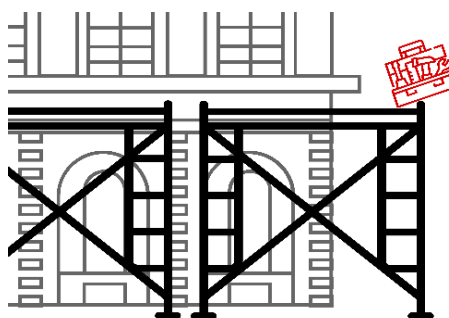
Usefully National Highways specifically sub divides all its reporting categories into high and low potential. High potential [HiPo] is described by the criteria *“An event or set of conditions or circumstances where the outcome on that occasion did not result in a major injury or damage; however with only a slight change in the circumstances had the potential to cause fatal injuries, serious bodily harm or major property damage”*

FAME favours the use of the National Highways definitions. FAME collects near-miss figures from its members in an annual survey.

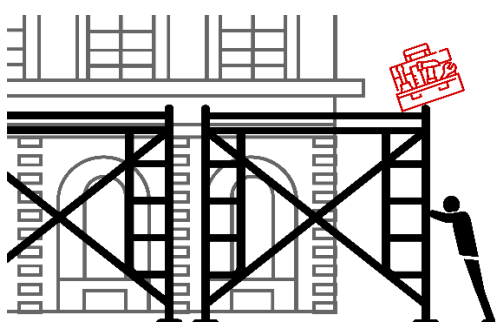
**Safe Condition**



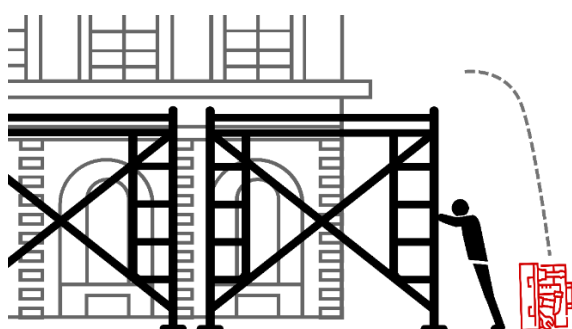
**Unsafe Condition**



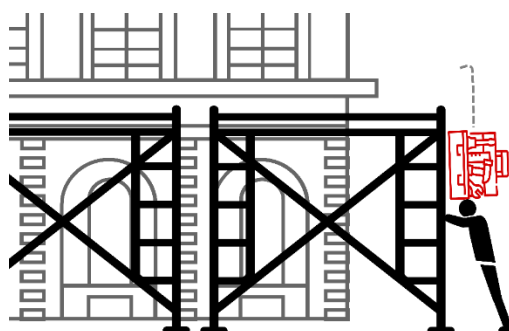
**Unsafe Act**



**Near-miss**



**Accident**



## 4 Implementing Near-Miss Reporting

A near-miss is not *an accident waiting to happen*. That is an unsafe condition/undesired circumstance. To be called a near-miss something will have happened although no one was injured. However, these distinctions may deter workers from reporting at all. You should ask workers to report anything that concerns them. A precise designation could be part of the investigation of a reported near-miss. This is also a

reason why some larger construction companies use a different name other than near-miss reporting.

Discussing lots of examples with workers gets them thinking more than a theoretical definition. Here are just a few:

- items falling near to someone
- vehicle reversing without a plant marshal
- Fencing around an excavation moved and not put back
- Spilt fuel

Lots of near miss systems focus on safety. But they can be applied to health hazards as well. Here are just a few examples:

- Vibrating generator causing high noise level
- Overloaded wheelbarrow
- Dirty sink in mess room
- Digging up unexpected asbestos

**How many near-misses should I get?**



There should be many near-misses but if you do not, then issues are almost certainly unreported. Theoretical models exist which give numbers over 600 near-misses to every one serious injury. The more that are reported the more opportunity you have to learn from mistakes and improve. Set a target to increase numbers of reported near-misses month on month.

If numbers are quite low try a temporary anonymous/amnesty approach as that can draw out more reports.



### How do I record reported issues/near-misses?

The best is the simplest way possible. Some systems use a version of their accident forms other just have a simple A5 form or card. Your system could be in parallel with or integrated with other reporting systems (eg environmental). Make forms easily available in workplace areas.

Avoid report by e-mail as many workers will not have access to e-mails. Reporting to a supervisor may stop some workers reporting but does allow the worker to report something verbally. Workers might like to report by text or app, but many workplaces rightly ban mobiles on site.

All staff should understand that they need to report a near-miss just as they would report an actual accident, and senior management must make the reporting procedures clear. As with an accident, there are details which should be included in the report to enable effective action to be taken.

- Time and date of the incident
- Where the incident took place
- The type of incident, e.g. slip, fall, collision
- The work activities taking place before the incident
- Information on what happened
- Details of the person or people involved

Any person on your premises or sites should be able to report a near-miss. Cover how they can do this in the induction. Stress to contractors that reporting near-misses will not undermine their chance of working for you again. Ensure that a no blame approach covers contractors too.

### How do I review/investigate a reported hazard/near-miss?

In the same way as you would accidents. Even though the reporting should be simple, the investigation may be involved. The first step of the follow up could be to decide what level of investigation would be appropriate. Some near misses where the consequences could have been very serious [HiPo] justify more investigation than an injury accident. Look to identify corrective actions/ lessons to be learnt. Don't look for blame as it distracts from identifying root causes.

Feedback is very important. If workers do not receive feedback they soon become disinterested. All reports should be acknowledged irrespective of their quality. Always communicate back to workers in good time even if no action can be taken quickly. Some companies display/publish lists of completed actions to demonstrate that reporting does lead to change.

A review of reported events over time may reveal patterns from which lessons can be learned such as weaknesses in operational procedures

#### **What near-miss data should I share during tender or PQQ processes?**

Sadly, the experience of several FAME members is that some clients are poorly informed on near-misses. They expect you to record them but incorrectly value lower rather than higher numbers. So, a precise designation between near-misses and undesired circumstance plus a designation of HiPo where relevant is important. Correctly categorising could be part of the investigation of a reported near-miss.

Being open and honest on tender PQQ is important. FAME suggests that HiPo near misses are quoted at tender PQQ stage making clear the definition you have used.

## **5 Additional information and caveat**

The above seeks to offer broad guidance to Archaeological Practitioners. However, it does not cover all eventuality and circumstances that may be encountered. For further advice please contact your internal or external competent source of health and safety advice.

## 6 Further reading

Further HSE guidance on dangerous occurrences

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/riddor/dangerous-occurences.htm>

Interim Advice Note 128/15 Health & Safety Incident Reporting:  
NATIONAL HIGHWAYS

Guidance on the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Reporting of  
Accidents and Dangerous Occurrences) Regulations 2016

[https://www.hsa.ie/eng/Publications\\_and\\_Forms/Publications/Safety\\_and\\_Health\\_Management/Accident\\_and\\_Dangerous\\_Occurrences\\_Reporting.pdf](https://www.hsa.ie/eng/Publications_and_Forms/Publications/Safety_and_Health_Management/Accident_and_Dangerous_Occurrences_Reporting.pdf)

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