

Safety Culture and Concrete Pumpers: A Successful Mix



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According to the National Safety Council (NSC), a “near miss” is an unplanned event that did not result in injury, illness or damage, but had the potential to do so. In fact, only a fortunate break in the chain of events prevented these things from happening.

That said, what otherwise might also be referred to as a close call, a narrow escape, or even a near collision, is much less a cause for exhaling, wiping the brow and getting back to work, and probably more so a stark reminder that you’re only as safe as your safety culture. As the NSC additionally points out, a faulty process or management system is invariably the root cause for the increased risk that leads to the near miss and should ultimately be the focus of improvement.

As can often be the case with safety, it comes down to culture. And in this particular case, how can your safety culture keep near misses at the forefront of a conversation that leads to accident prevention?

On that premise, a company’s culture should proactively seek to identify and control hazards, which certainly reduces risk, but a well-executed program goes beyond that. Collecting near-miss reports is a good place to start. The hazard(s) should be appropriately identified and thoroughly investigated, and the root causes should be determined in order to implement appropriate controls.

And everyone should be involved, from the corner office to the job site, and many places in between, where hazards lie in wait often just out of sight, and mostly out of mind. Employee participation is especially crucial to a successful near-miss program. After all, it’s mostly your employees that experience and report these incidents—so it makes sense that they should be trained on how to properly identify and recognize potential hazards.

But those workers must also feel confident that the entire organization is on the same page and equally committed to said program. Employees want to both know and believe that their employer is committed to any program set forth, but especially safety. It’s incumbent on management to make sure that not only is the program implemented efficiently, but articulated in a way that makes sense to employees within every layer of the organization, and adapted accordingly.

Effective Preparation

Near-miss accident prevention should find firm footing within company safety cultures across all industries, and that certainly includes

concrete pumping. Any number of safety risks exist within and around a concrete pumping job site—from pump truck boom placement (power lines), to scaffoldings and similar buildings/structures, to outrigger pads, ground pressure, concrete mix quality, proper hose application and more.

It begs the question: What protocols do you have established with your teams to promote a “see something, say something” mentality? And how does your safety and loss-prevention plan support that culture—using telematics to coach minor infractions? Moreover, what’s happening to your safety culture when the basics of safety like lockout/tagout aren’t followed?

“It’s extremely important to identify the root cause of a near-miss incident,” said Kyle Rask, program manager for concrete pumping at NBIS. “And we want to focus on those causal factors versus blame. Was it an isolated incident or systematic? And why? Then, it’s more about coaching, mentoring, instead of hardline discipline. You’ll get more commitment from staff when they see that management is also committed—invested in improvement.”

Rask has over 15 years of experience in concrete pumping operations, safety/regulatory management, leadership and product development, and is an active member of the American Concrete Pumping Association (ACPA), serves on several committees and is also a current ASME B30.27 subcommittee member.

He noted, “Safety professionals will likely find that employees are more receptive to engaging in accident prevention than an incident investigation. Often, they’re more inclined to dial in and make a positive contribution when discussing a near miss, but companies might discover it’s more challenging to get workers to discuss ‘what happened’ post-accident.”

With that in mind, incentives are an additional aspect of the safety culture process, Rask pointed out. “As leaders, you need to ask yourself, how effectively are your incentives changing behavior? And what are the criteria—does that make sense? Is it fair? Are rewards tangible? All of this should be directly tied to consistent safety meetings and committees—who is attending, when and where are they held, are the topics relatable?”

Beyond the operational risks, he also underscored the fact that every concrete pumper is engaged in several different contracts at any given moment. “Are those contracts protecting your business in the event of a loss?”

Emphasizing that the contracts used by concrete pumpers need to be consistent with their coverage form, Rask added, “Between regulations, state-specific language and the policy forms, this can quickly

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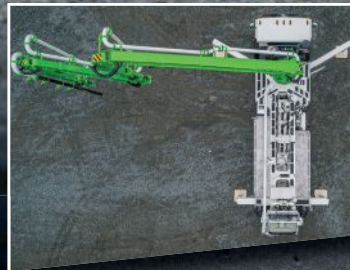
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become a legal nightmare. The carrier partner or MGA (managing general agent) providing coverage should also offer related services such as contract support. And what if contract management costs additional money and is substandard, or worse yet, not provided at all?"

Essentially, Rask is highlighting the idea that risk prevention for concrete pumpers is not just a vital safety culture component created at the top and implemented down through each layer of the organization to the workers on the ground, but also a contractual reality that, while not as tangible as onsite application of safety rules, is equally central to job site success, and should be managed as such.

To that end, he indicated, "Do you know what to sign and what not to sign to protect your business from the worst-case scenario? Do you have alternate language to substitute for unacceptable language when a contract is presented to you? Basically, do you have someone on your side—either your insurance agent or your insurance carrier—to review current contracts, relate contracts to policy terms and stand next to you in the event of a powerful claim? Are you prepared?"

Collaborative Environment

Unfortunately, it doesn't take much digging to find an assortment of companies across the industry space that found themselves at the

mercy of a claim because their safety activities were reactive versus proactive—across all layers of the business. Befuddlingly, too many organizations wait for losses to occur before taking the necessary steps that would have prevented the loss in the first place.

As the NSC explains, near-miss incidents often precede loss-producing events, but may be overlooked, as there was no harm (injury, damage or loss). An organization may not have a reporting culture where employees are encouraged to report these close calls. As a result, many opportunities to prevent the incidents are lost. This is all the more reason to practice continuous improvement with observe-correct and reward-reinforcement behaviors from management that support open dialogue and a healthy safety culture.

In theme with a common expression used in psychology—the best indicator of future behavior is past behavior—history has shown too often within the industry space that past events are usually the best indicator of future events, and that most loss-producing events were likely preceded by applicable warnings and/or near-miss incidents.

A well-organized, developed and implemented safety culture will greatly reduce such risk, and in turn, create a collaborative environment where workers feel committed to not just job site success, but the long-term viability of the company they work for. **CP**



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