

... Firefighters can now start reporting near-miss (or close call) events at www.firefighternearmiss.com, the Web-based National Fire Fighter Near-Miss Reporting System. The International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) officially launched the program August 12, 2005, at a press conference at the IAFC's Fire-Rescue International conference in Denver, Colorado.

Firefighternearmiss.com will help the fire service track the close calls—incidents that did not lead to serious injury or death—and learn from these human errors to increase its overall ability to protect firefighters and the communities they serve. Firefighters who experience a near-miss event fill out a quick, user-friendly report that is de-identified and posted so firefighters in other departments can learn from the experiences. All reports are voluntary, non-punitive and confidential.

Once a report is submitted, it is read and analyzed by at least two fire service reviewers. These active duty fire service personnel ensure the confidentiality of the report, code it for data purposes and post it for review by the fire service. The analyzed data will be used to identify trends that can assist in formulating strategies to reduce firefighter injuries and fatalities. Depending on the urgency, information will be presented to the fire service community via program reports, press releases and e-mail alerts.

“It used to be that when a firefighter experienced a near miss, he or she might share it with fellow firefighters at the firehouse kitchen table over dinner,” said Chief Bob DiPoli, 2004–2005 president of the IAFC. “The Near-Miss Reporting System is like a virtual kitchen table that allows firefighters to share those stories—and the lessons learned from them—with firefighters from around the country.”

Firefighternearmiss.com is based on a successful safety program used in the aviation industry for the last 28 years. The airline industry can prove statistically that tracking near-miss incidents has significantly decreased the number of aviation injuries and deaths. Several other industries and organizations, including the medical field, the petroleum/chemical industry and the U.S. military, have addressed near-miss reporting and are receiving similar results in changing the number of injuries and fatalities.

The National Fire Fighter Near-Miss Reporting System is funded by grants from the Department of Homeland Security's Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program and Fireman's Fund Insurance Company. Firefighternearmiss.com is endorsed by the International Association of Fire Chiefs, the International Association of Fire Fighters, and the Volunteer and Combination Officers Section of the IAFC, and it is supported by firefighterclosecalls.com in mutual dedication to firefighter safety and survival.

“The success of this innovative near-miss tool in the aviation industry in preventing accidents and passenger deaths and injuries has been unprecedented,” according to U.S. Fire Administrator R. David Paulison. “I look forward to working with the IAFC and this nation's fire departments to ensure that, at the end of each day, Everyone Goes Home.”

“We are proud to partner with the IAFC on the Near-Miss Reporting System. By reducing accidents and fatalities in the fire service, this vital program will benefit every firefighter across the country,” said Darryl Siry, vice president of Fireman's Fund Insurance Company and executive director of the Fireman's Fund Heritage program. “This is in line with our company's founding mission to support the fire service, and it complements our other grant and volunteer programs.”

“Fireman's Fund Insurance Company and the Department of Homeland Security are critical partners in this important program,” said DiPoli. “Their support will impact the lives of the more than one million firefighters in the United States, and we thank them for their generous support of the fire service.”

Firefighter death and injury rates have continued to occur at a constant rate, in spite of significant improvements in technology and personal protective equipment, and death and injury reports indicate that a number of these deaths are due in large part to human error and not to technological failure. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) estimates that for every 100 incidents of injury, one million close call incidents go unreported.