

WHAT IS A “CLOSE CALL?”

A **close call** is an “almost-accident:” if circumstances were slightly different, someone could have been injured or something could have been damaged.

Close calls are warning signs—often, a laboratory experiences one or more close calls before having a real incident, frequently involving the same causes. Reporting, investigating, and discussing close calls helps prevent real accidents.

Exactly what is a close call and what is an incident is sometimes a matter of judgment. If you arrive in the morning and discover a pressurized apparatus has ejected a part, thrown it across the lab, and dented a storage cabinet, you could consider this a close call—someone could have been hurt had he or she been in the way. You could also consider it an incident, because there were property damage consequences.

Other times, the event is clearly a close call: someone leaves round metal bar stock on the floor where someone could tread on it and slip.

TIPS

- If someone was injured, or another significant safety event actually happened (fire, chemical spill, serious property damage), [report it as an incident](#).
- Please report close calls to closecalls@jhu.edu. Learning from close calls helps prevent actual incidents.
- When you report a close call, an investigator may contact you for further details and to discuss lessons learned for the campus community. Public descriptions of the close call will be discreet: no details (such as exact locations) will be given unless they are essential to understanding the lessons to be learned.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever had a close call? Tell the story to your research group. What lessons did you and others learn from it?
2. Has anyone else ever described a close call to you? Was anything done about the cause(s)?