nutshell™
enterprise apps in minutes

How is mobile technology transforming Close Call reporting?

Many accidents and incidents that occur on the railway are preceded by a Close Call, which warns of a potential safety problem.

Although these Close Calls don't result in injuries or fatalities, or damage to equipment or the environment, they provide valuable information, allowing companies to pro-actively manage safety and prevent a more serious incident or accident occurring.

As a result, Close Call reporting is central to safety on the railways, providing the opportunity to improve safety practices in situations that could potentially have more serious consequences. Workers are required to report any close calls so that risks can be eliminated before incidents or injuries occur, and there are tough penalties for failure to record Close Calls correctly.

What is a Close Call?

A Close Call is defined by [Network Rail](#) as anything that has the potential to cause harm or damage. It's something that could have resulted in an injury, accident, or damage to property, but didn't.

This includes the potential to:

· Harm a person, including minor and major injuries, as well as fatalities
· Harm the environment and/or a protected species
· Damage railway infrastructure, plant, vehicles, tools, equipment and systems

Formerly known as Irregular Working, Operational Close Calls are unplanned or uncontrolled events that occur on the operational railway and have the potential to cause damage, loss or injury to workers, plant, equipment, property or infrastructure.

There are four categories of Operational Close Calls that must be reported:

Protection
A protection Close Call results in the incorrect or inadequate implementation of a line blockage, working outside of the protection limits, or the removal of protection.

Possession
A possession Close Call results in the incorrect placement of protection, inadequate or incorrect protection, or removal of protection.

Operating
This type of Close Call involves an operator giving permission for protection to be laid when a train hasn't yet passed the site, giving permission to cross the line when it isn't clear, failure to caution trains, and switching incidents.

On Track Machine or Equipment
This refers to a Close Call involving on track plant or engineering trains, or the incorrect use or placement of equipment or materials.

But Close Calls are not just avoided incidents. They are also opportunities – opportunities to improve safety practices and reduce risk by understanding the factors that led to an unsafe event.

Reporting close calls

Reporting close calls means that immediate risks can be removed, and managers can also identify areas of high risk and the steps that can be taken to avoid serious incidents.

So, for example, if a trip hazard is identified, it should be reported as a close call before someone trips over it and it becomes an incident.

If Close Calls are left unreported, they can't be learned from, which may result in serious, but avoidable consequences.

When reporting a Close Call, track-side workers will usually need to provide information such as:

· A detailed description of the event or hazard
· Location details
· Details of the people and/or equipment involved
· Any other information that may be helpful

However, traditional, paper-based Close Call reporting can be problematic, with workers having to carry and complete paper forms on site. This can result in Close Calls not being reported, or not being reported until significantly after the event. Manual reporting and entry can also lead to errors such as double entry and inconsistent reporting formats, as well as issues such as lost forms, illegible writing, incorrect data entry, delayed submission, etc.

Once a Close Call has been reported, a Responsible Manager will work to resolve the issue, and then close it.

The benefits of effectively reporting and collating Close Call data

Close Call data can prove highly beneficial in the safety management process. In addition to highlighting weaknesses in the safety system and rectifying them before an incident occurs, the data can also be used to monitor the impact of any safety changes over time.

Utilising mobile technology to create an online reporting system will make the trackside completion of Close Call reports faster, easier, and more accurate, reducing paperwork and removing the need for paper forms to be carried onsite.

The reports can be made instantly and in real-time, allowing them to be acted upon straight away, with real-time information being shared with other track side workers. Not only this, but the data collected can be analysed and stored centrally, making it accessible from anywhere, and with a thorough audit trail.

With mobile technology, workers can also use their devices to take images documenting the issue, which can be uploaded and stored as evidence alongside the submitted close call report form. Other attachments such as documents and diagrams can also be shared.
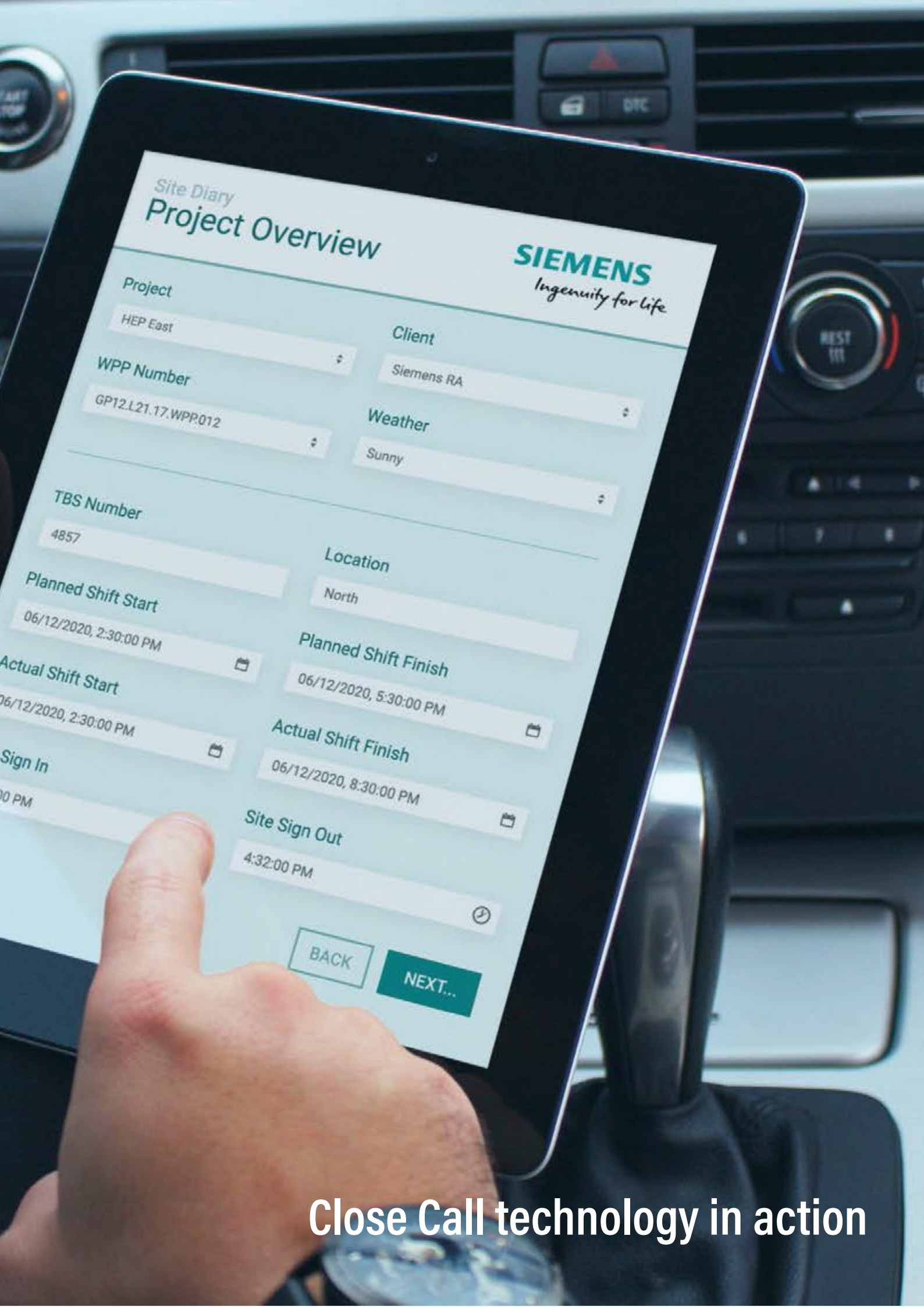
Close Call technology in action

Siemens

Global construction and infrastructure company Siemens have a rail services division consisting of more than 4,000 employees.

Siemens identified that if they could make their Close Call reporting processes digital, they would speed up completion, hand-over, and sign off, meaning less man-hours would be wasted completing forms. Engineers would also have better access to data on the potential risks they may face.

Using Nutshell's no-code technology, Siemens built and launched their own track-side close call management app, allowing them to enhance and streamline their Close Call reporting process to reduce the risk of injuries and fatalities, while increasing the reliability of the data collected.

Siemens built and tested several prototypes, launching four health and safety apps live to the rail services team in less time than it would have taken to sign-off the purchase order for a software development firm.

Sharon Parker, Lead Site Support Controller at Siemens: "Before, we'd have to enter all the forms into Word, but now we take an export weekly for the commercial team, which alone saves around one full admin salary a year.

"Users are now forced to fill in all forms, which they didn't always complete when they were in papers and it is now legible so we can read everything...it minimises human error."

Explore the Siemens case study to find out more.

To find out more about how we can help you develop technology-based Close Call reporting systems with our no-code mobile apps, please get in touch.

📞 +44 0191 499 8507 ✉️ hello@nutshellapps.com