

The term accident has permeated the world of safety and risk management and is often used in business to describe a worker's injury or illness, a motor vehicle collision or third-party injuries. Documenting such an event usually involves the completion of an accident report and/or accident investigation. The dictionary defines an accident as: (1) *an unfortunate incident that happens unexpectedly and unintentionally, typically resulting in damage or injury*; (2) *an event that happens by chance or that is without apparent or deliberate cause*.

Tragic "Accidents"

May 28, 2015—According to the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA), a 20-year-old employee of an ice making manufacturer was breaking ice when he fell into an unguarded screw conveyor. Reportedly, the fall caused injuries that ultimately led to surgical amputation of the employee's legs. The media reported this event as an **industrial accident**.

December 5, 2015—On his first day of work for a tree and stump removal service company, a 19-year-old man died after being pulled into a wood chipper. According to the owner of the tree service company, a tree branch may have grabbed a piece of the worker's clothing as the branch was pulled into the chipper. This death was ruled an **accident** (i.e., not intentional).

Not Really an Accident

Let's take a closer look at a few key terms in the definition of accident—***unexpectedly, unintentionally, happens by chance*** and ***without apparent or deliberate cause***. These terms describe an event that is uncontrollable, unforeseeable and unpreventable. The perception is that accidents just happen and, regardless of safety efforts, accidents are unavoidable. This implies that such events, workplace injuries, are part of the price of doing business; that injuries are an inevitable.

Stop Saying Accident

The simple first step is to change the general lexicon about workplace safety and risk management surrounding the term *accident*. Overuse of the term accident reinforces a belief that injuries are uncontrollable, unforeseeable and unpreventable. We need to take responsibility of our actions by replacing accident with a term or set of terms like "injury or illness event" or "safety failure [Todd Conklin, Ph.D.]". Change a word, change the attitude! Shifting to the use of another term, changes the mindset. Injury or illness events can be explained to show how the event was caused and how to prevent it. The term safety failure implies that something in the process "failed" ...i.e. that the incident was avoidable.

Tragic Events Reexamined

The tragic events at the ice manufacturer and tree service companies were not accidents; these events didn't "just happen"; they were caused by safety program failures. Most importantly these events did not have to happen. They could have easily been avoided:

- Three years earlier, the ice manufacturer had been cited by OSHA for an improperly installed guard over the screw conveyor that injured the worker in 2015. After the 2015 injury event, OSHA's inspectors found that the safety guard over the screw conveyor had been completely removed.
- At the time this was written, OSHA was reportedly investigating the event where the 19-year-old was killed by a wood chipper. This was a horrific event and serious questions about cause need to be asked, such as: Why did management direct an employee, on his first of day of employment, to operate a commercial wood chipper? Was the employee supervised? Were there any properly functioning safeguards? Was there any safety training?

Lyons' risk management and safety professionals often ask our clients (both line staff and management) if it is realistic to have zero accidents at their workplace. Most of the time we hear "it would be nice to not have any accidents, but accidents just happen".

At Lyons Companies, we do not accept that accidents just happen. Our focus is on changing the perception—***Workplace injuries / illnesses [accidents] are caused and don't just happen*** and that having zero injury events or safety failures is truly possible.

Strategies to Achieve Zero Losses

In the next edition of the Lyons Risk Control & Safety TIPS, we will discuss how to achieve zero injury / illness events via the following:

- Examine and compare safety and risk control strategies about employee behavior and business systems
- Restructuring success metrics
- Use of leading indicators
- Business culture vs Safety culture
- How to take advantage of web-based mobile risk management technology

For More Information

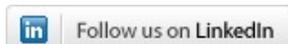
Please contact the Lyons' Companies Risk Control Department with any risk control service needs.

riskcontrol@lyonsinsurance.com

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