



# TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY SYSTEM Risk Management™

## RM Quarterly - Spring 2011

### Accidents Don't Happen

Behind every tragic accident there often lurks a preventable event. Looking ahead can help to prevent a lifetime of regret and a devastating financial loss.

**Stop the press.** These words typically herald the excitement of breaking news. War has ended ... or war has begun. Either way, the press must be stopped for a new headline. Early in our career, though, we stood witness as the press had to be stopped because a workman's arm had been caught in the fast moving equipment. How did it happen? He was wearing a long-sleeved shirt.



**Planned accidents.** Most workplace accidents follow a familiar script. A shortcut was taken. Safety regulations were ignored. Machinery was used for the wrong purpose or incorrectly. Common sense was abandoned. Start with any of these actions, and the first part of a plan that leads nowhere good has been put into place.

**Taking charge.** The term "accident" implies helplessness. It suggests that unavoidable misfortune has been brought to bear by cruel fate. While this system of classification may lessen feelings of guilt and self-recrimination, it perpetuates a cycle of personal and financial loss. With consequences ranging from missed workdays to missed birthdays, we are challenged to believe less in fate and more in our own ability to control the future. Change the narrative to change attitudes.

**Build in time.** Personal and business risks are increased when time is cut out of workflow. Build adequate time into all processes, and communicate this message to everyone involved. Time is our friend in all things but grief, and grief is what we are trying to prevent.

**Advocate safety.** Champion safety just as vigorously as you champion project completion. Accidents are expensive.

**Break it down.** All work is a series of actions. And each action drives what comes next. Start by getting staff to think about the actions they are taking. Identify places the process can break down.

**Tell the truth.** There is nothing pretty about what comes after many accidents. As Joe Friday would say, "Just the facts, Ma'am". So it is with reporting accidents. Folks don't get in trouble for telling the truth but a lie will get you every time.