

Terminology Used in OHS

Terminology

Probably the best example of a lack of scientific discipline in OHS lies in the terminology “accident”

The term “accident” implies carelessness (whatever that means), lack of ability to control its causation, an inability to foresee and prevent and a personal failure. How can we make meaningful progress on a major cost to Australian industry if we persist with such, sloppy, unscientific terminology? The term “accident” affects how the general population perceives damaging occurrences and the people who suffer the personal damage, inferring the event is “an act of god” or similar event beyond the control and understanding of mere mortals.(Geoff McDonald)

The term “accident” is best replaced by the term “personal damage occurrence”. Instead of talking about “permanent disability” we should be talking about “life-altering personal damage” There is a poor understanding in the community of the reasons why personal damage occurs.

We are quick to make the assumption that the worker was careless, when one examines personal damage carefully one will also identify a range of work system factors that contributed to the personal damage as well. Most of these work system factors are the responsibility of the employer at both common and statute law. Blaming workers for their careless behaviour is an emotionally appealing approach that is usually not all that productive in the bigger picture of preventing personal damage at work

People talk about “accident” “causes” (another emotionally laden term) Investigating personal damage occurrences thoroughly will reveal at least 30 “essential factors”(an essential factor is one without which the final personal damage could not have occurred)