



FIGURE 3-3 Accident/incident theory.

industry was shocked when a class action lawsuit was filed against PPC by 50 employees—all of whom claimed to have back injuries. Because of PPC's excellent safety record, most observers felt sure that the company would be vindicated in the end.

The company's policies and procedures relating to safety and health were investigated thoroughly by consultants brought in by PPC and by the attorney for the plaintiffs. More than 100 employees gave depositions, and several preliminary hearings were held. By the time the trial finally rolled around, both sides had accumulated mountains of paper and filing cabinets full of evidence. Then, suddenly and without explanation, PPC offered a substantial out-of-court settlement, which the plaintiffs accepted.

It was one of PPC's outside consultants who discovered what had caused the increased incidence of accidents. The company had always followed a centralized approach to managing safety and health. Responsibility for tasks such as

measurement, inspection, correction, and investigation was assigned to a safety manager—Jack Bond. Bond had an excellent record during his 20 years in the precast concrete industry; the last 5 years had been spent at PPC. In fact, he was so well respected in the industry that his peers had elected him president of a statewide safety organization. This, as it turned out, is where PPC's troubles began.

When Bond took over, the safety organization had experienced a three-year decline in membership and was struggling to stay afloat financially. He had been elected as "the man who could save the organization." Intending to do just that, Bond went right to work. For months at a time, he worked seven days a week, often spending as much as two weeks at a time on the road. When he was in his office at PPC, Bond was either on the telephone or doing paperwork for the safety organization.

Within six months, he had reversed the organization's downhill slide, but not without paying a price at home.