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On the lighter side...CLIENTS ENGINEER ACCIDENTS

*Article originally published by: Engineerings, L. Robert Smith, PE., F.ASCE, Past President,
Providence Engineering Society*

L. Robert Smith, P.E., F.ASCE, is a contributor to the Providence Engineering Society's Engineerings newsletter. He often writes about his own experiences as an engineer and surveyor, focusing on the lighter side of the profession. This article first appeared in Engineerings and is reprinted with permission.

We were called in on an accident case. An individual had had a piece of metal shaving lodged in his finger. He couldn't get it out. He went over to the factory window to look at it in better light, but the windows were filthy. He raised the window about a foot and put his finger out the window, just above the sill, to look at it. The window dropped down and amputated the finger. They rushed him and the finger to the hospital. The finger was too crushed to be re-attached.

The lawyer for whom we were working received permission to have us enter the factory premises and take some measurements and run some tests. The man who had been injured was to meet us there and supply information as to how high he had actually raised the window, etc. In order to measure the force of the impact, we had decided to take a number of dowel rods, of varying diameters, with us. We would drop the window until we found the largest sized dowel that would be broken. Later we would have the dowel tested

in a laboratory. We selected a half-inch-diameter dowel and placed it just above the window sill. The window was just about twelve inches above the sill. I banged the side of the window and it dropped like a guillotine. It hit the dowel and broke it. I heard this thud behind me. I turned around and there was the individual, with the amputated finger, passed out cold on the floor. When the window had hit the dowel, all he could see was his finger being amputated. We discussed whether to complete the tests and then revive him, but we opted for calling the rescue squad. He was conscious when they arrived. They checked him for bruises and took his pulse and blood pressure. They recommended that he not witness any more testing though.

A lawyer called me. His client had slipped on a smooth finished concrete island at a gas station, which was wet. The client had broken his elbow and had his arm in a sling. Hospital A's Emergency Room had not wanted to cast it until the swelling reduced. We went to the gas station and pulled

weights with leather shoe sole bottoms on them, with a spring scale. The concrete was wet down with a watering can to approximate the rainy conditions of the previous night. The concrete surface was slippery to the point of being a hazard. In speaking to the clerk at the gas station, he told me that he hadn't seen it happen. As a matter of fact, the man had pulled down to the far pump to get his gas.

He found that surprising in that it was raining quite hard at the time. A woman who was with the man ran up to the station and gave the clerk ten dollars for gas. She went back to the car and saw the man lying on the concrete. She went back into the station, had the clerk come out with her, witness the scene, and help her put the man into the car. She drove him to the emergency room.

Later that afternoon a second lawyer called me. He had a client who had fallen outside a restaurant during the

rain the night before. His "wife" ran into the restaurant and told the maitre d' what had happened. She asked him to come outside and help her put the man into his car. She drove him to Hospital B. His elbow was fractured. They put it in a sling and told him to have an orthopedic surgeon set it when the swelling reduced. He gave me his client's name and naturally it was the same last name as the man who fell at the gas station, but a different first name. Coincidentally, the two men who fell and broke their right elbows had the same first and middle initials, only reversed. I told the lawyer about this strange coincidence. He said "I wish you hadn't said anything. This could have been a nice case." About an hour later, he called me back. He wanted to make sure that I told the other lawyer what had happened, so I did. I guess he didn't want the other lawyer to make a score. The first lawyer said, "To me, ours is the legitimate accident, the other one must be a scam!"

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