

The Record Was Always There

Why documented industrial safety patterns go unnoticed, and what changes when somebody assembles them



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Abstract.

Industrial incidents are among the most thoroughly documented events in commercial life. They are investigated, written up, cited and published. Despite this, the same patterns recur within the same organisations, and are commonly rediscovered only after a further event. This paper argues the failure is not one of information but of assembly — no party has both the incentive and the standing to place an organisation's documented history side by side and ask whether it repeats.

1. The paradox

Few industries record their failures as carefully as process industries. Regulators publish enforcement actions. Investigation bodies publish reports running to hundreds of pages. Companies disclose incident rates. Industry associations aggregate fatality statistics annually.

And yet recurrence is routine. An operator has a confined-space event, investigates it thoroughly, implements the recommendations, and has a structurally similar event years later at a different facility. The information required to anticipate the second event existed in public before it happened.

2. Why assembly does not happen

Four reasons, none of them negligence:

- **Investigations are bounded by design.** A report examines one event. Doing so well requires depth rather than breadth, and comparison across events is outside its terms of reference.
- **The record is fragmented by the publisher.** Regulator databases, investigation bodies, filings and trade press each hold a fragment, in different formats, without a shared identifier for the organisation.
- **Internal assembly is discouraged.** A document that lists an operator's own events and notes their similarity is a liability exhibit. The incentive to write it internally is negative.
- **External assembly reads as an attack.** When a campaigning organisation or a competitor assembles the same record, the receiving organisation defends rather than examines. The information is identical; the reception is not.

The information problem was solved decades ago. The assembly problem was never anyone's job.

3. What assembly reveals

Grouping documented events by task family rather than by facility, date or severity changes what is visible. Events that appear unrelated — a maintenance fatality at one plant, a release at another, a near-miss at a third — resolve into a single recurring task failure when grouped by the work being performed.

This grouping is possible because industrial tasks are a small set. Isolation and stored energy, confined space entry, hot work, breaking containment, start-up and shutdown, lifting, handover. Most documented serious events are failures of one of a dozen or so task families, which makes the recurrence visible in a way that facility-level or severity-level grouping does not.

4. The conditions for a document like this to work

A report of this kind is only useful if it is received rather than resisted. That places constraints on its construction that are as important as its content:

- **It must be free.** An organisation should not have to purchase the right to see its own public record. A paid version is a different document with a different purpose, and would be read as such.
- **It must contain no sales content.** One product mention converts a public-interest document into a pitch, and the reader will assume the analysis was shaped to reach the pitch.
- **It must not attribute cause where none has been established.** Stating that three events involved isolation is a fact. Stating why is an investigation's job.
- **It must be correctable in public.** Errors are inevitable in open-source compilation. A published correction log is the only durable evidence that the document is not adversarial.
- **It must name a human.** Accountability for accuracy has to sit with a person willing to be contacted about it.

5. The objection worth taking seriously

Compiling an organisation's incident history without their involvement can be characterised as hostile, whatever the intent. This deserves a direct answer rather than a reassurance.

The answer has three parts. Every source is already public and was published by a regulator, an investigator or the organisation itself. The report is given to the subject organisation, free, with

an offer of correction before any wider use. And the alternative to assembly is not privacy — the record remains public either way. It is only unexamined.

6. Why an AI company

The assembly problem is a retrieval and structuring problem across fragmented public sources, which is now tractable at low cost. That is a sufficient technical explanation, but not a sufficient reason.

The better reason is that any organisation holding safety knowledge across many operators faces a choice about what to do with a pattern that would help someone else. EON's published data rights standard resolves that choice contractually: where a pattern bears on life safety, both EON and its customers are obliged to permit its disclosure in de-identified form, and neither may suppress it. A report built entirely from public sources is the least contentious application of that principle.

7. Conclusion

Every event in a report of this kind was investigated, documented and published before it appeared. Nothing was uncovered. The only work performed was placing them next to one another and asking whether they repeat — which, on the evidence of the last several decades, is work nobody was doing