



Club Safety: Manage Risk and Avoid Disaster

By Alan E. Achatz, CCM, CHE

“I’m from OSHA, and I’m here to help.” That might have been the case in recent years, but times have changed and the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA)

recently announced that it will be shifting its focus away from developing tools to support clubs and other small businesses. OSHA is making enforcement a priority.

Unfortunately, very few clubs across the country have safety directors. So who is in charge of raising employee safety awareness and making sure the club is in compliance with OSHA requirements?

Alan Achatz is a safety consultant specializing in private clubs. As an Authorized Trainer of OSHA’s General Industry Outreach program, Achatz has been helping private clubs across the country with safety awareness. His menu of services includes education sessions for staff; club safety audits “similar to what OSHA would do but without the penalties,” and assisting with emergency planning. He has authored more than 70 safety articles and a safety book for the club industry. Achatz also served as a team member on the Club Managers Association of America (CMAA) and OSHA Alliance.

So what will prompt OSHA to show up? Federal OSHA inspection priorities are “Imminent Danger” followed by inspections of fatalities and/or catastrophes, then complaints/referrals and finally programmed inspections. If you do experience an initial inspection, OSHA’s compliance officers will also conduct follow-up and monitoring inspections to ensure that hazards are being corrected and employees are being protected.

OSHA must also be notified within eight (8) hours after the death of any employee from a work-related incident or the in-patient hospitalization of three or more employees as a result of a work-related incident. You may file your report by telephone or in person at the closest OSHA Area Office.

While Achatz prefers to be behind the scenes proactively helping clubs improve safety, he has also been summoned to clubs to assist with both fatal and non-fatal accidents. As a component of his work with CMAA, Achatz undertook a study of injury and fatality data for the club industry. OSHA provided a ten year history of injury and fatality data to serve as the foundation of his research. The chart below illustrates the types of events that OSHA investigated. Some of the clubs in these reports were fined and in some instances these fines were considerable.

CHART-1

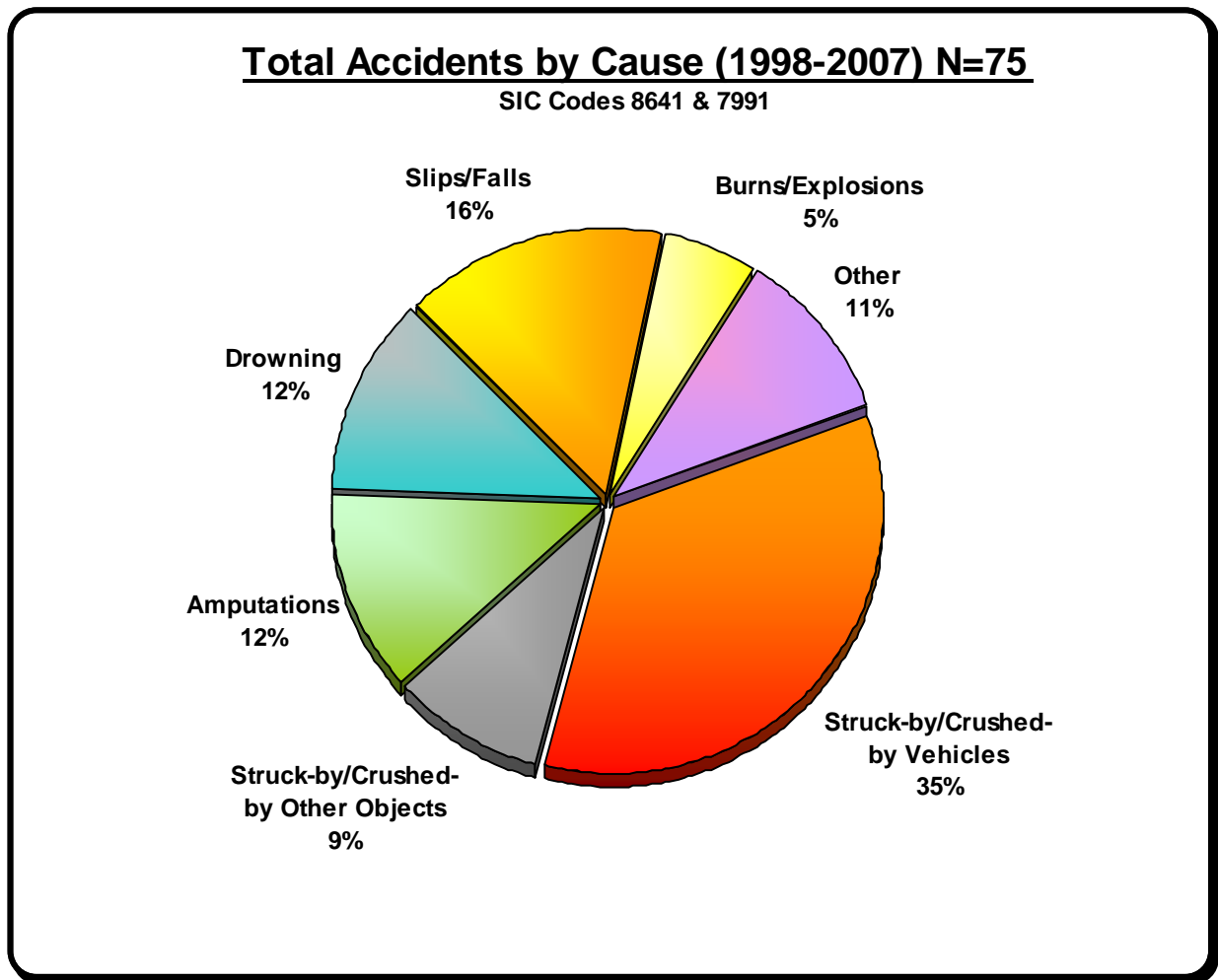


Chart-1 shows the primary cause of total accidents within civic, social and fraternal organizations and membership sports and recreation clubs between 1999 and 2007 was workers being struck or crushed by vehicles [generally golf carts (35%)]. The second leading cause of fatality was slips/falls (16%). These were followed by drowning and amputations, each contributing 12% to the total number of accidents.

Club Industry Insights

The chart depicts ten years of accidents at private clubs, with data gathered from 1998 through 2007. The majority of the clubs were golf and/or country clubs, however city and yacht clubs were not immune to either accidents or fatalities. Achatz said that in many cases, enhanced safety training and procedures could have improved the outcome or prevented the incident all together.

Drownings

Most golf and country club facilities have water on the property in the form of ponds, lakes or swimming pools. In many of the incidents reported to OSHA, employees working in or near the water were not been wearing life jackets and did not have access to a personal floatation device. A number of drowning incidents involved employees on tractors or golf carts rolling into ponds or water ways.

Safety Considerations:

- Employees working in, on or over water should wear personal floatation devices. Club should also consider creating a water safety checklist and equipment pack to be kept on utility trucks. If the crew uses canoes or kayaks to work around ponds, a safety checklist and equipment pack should be stored in or near each vessel.
- Establish and enforce mowing policies that keep motorized equipment well away from waterways or gradient changes in excess of 20°. New employees should be required to read and sign off on policies.

Struck by / Crushed by

All types of equipment including golf carts, skid steers, tractors, back hoes, front loaders, cars and trucks contributed to injuries and fatalities. Tree trimming operations dominated the narratives of non-vehicle “Struck by / Crushed” incidents.

Safety Considerations:

- New employees should be required to read and sign off on policies.
- Employees responsible for operating golf carts and other vehicles should undergo thorough training and orientation. Establish and enforce “Safe Vehicle Operation” policies that address issues such as speed, load and location. New employees should be required to read and sign off on policies.
- Tree trimming can put both participants and bystanders at risk. Consider assigning a dedicated safety supervisor to larger tree trimming projects. Employees wielding chainsaws, manning ropes or determining fall patterns should be trained and preferably have plenty of experience.

Slips and Falls

Fatalities were included in this category. Some of the incidents reported occurred in stair towers and on slippery surfaces.

Safety Considerations:

Prevention is the best medicine when it comes to falls. Achatz recommends a walk-through safety audit as a great way to get an objective look at your facility.

“Other” Events

Explosions, lightning strikes, electrocutions and trench collapses claimed lives at private clubs during the study period. Amputations represented 12 percent of the total incidents.

Safety team discussion items

One safety model says that for every one disabling injury; there were 29 first aid incidences preceded by 300 near misses (Source: H. W. Heinrich *Industrial Accident Prevention: A Scientific Approach Fourth Edition*). Achatz points out that the model represents 329 opportunities to save one person from the pain and suffering of a disabling injury, not to mention, the additional direct and indirect costs to the operation. (Achatz noted that not all safety professionals ascribe to this model.)

One way to open a dialogue about safety with your staff is to ask them to list near misses and discuss possible solutions.

Closing thoughts

Keeping your employees safe is the ultimate goal of this article. Using historical accident injury and fatality data from OSHA has helped look at events that have impacted clubs across the country.

What actions does Achatz recommend for clubs hoping to avoid an OSHA visit?

- Ensure your OSHA 300 and 300A logs are maintained (and retained for 5 years)
- Discuss potential hazards & safety concerns at your club and identify solutions.
- Implement the necessary safety policies and ensure regular training is conducted and documented.

Alan E. Achatz, CCM, CHE specializes in safety for athletic, city, country, golf, gun and yacht clubs. He conducts safety awareness programs, addresses crisis management scenarios, and assists with OSHA compliance issues. He is also a food safety instructor. He may be reached at Club Safety Solutions (716)565-9122 or www.clubssafetysolutions.com