

Looking for Causes

Just before midnight one dark and stormy night, a man called John Smith, an engine mechanic, was sitting in an isolated cabin in the woods. As he reached for a cigarette, he noticed he had only one left. Glancing at his watch, he realized that he had just enough time to hop in his car, and drive to the gas station down the road to buy cigarettes before it closed. As his car pulled out of his driveway and onto the highway, it was hit by his neighbour, who, returning from a long night of drinking, was unable to stop his car soon enough on the icy road. Smith was killed instantly. Later, as the townspeople were discussing the sad event, they shook their heads one after another and said, “We always knew that smoking would kill Smith.” It is worth noting that local officials had long been warned of the dangers of that part of the highway, especially in winter, and yet they seemed uninterested in doing anything about it. Apparently because the residents of that part of the town did not have any influence with local authorities. Others wondered if the liquor laws had been more faithfully enforced in the town whether the neighbour who smashed into Smith would have been as drunk as was.¹

Immediate Causes	Underlying Causes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• are often the most obvious and easily identifiable;• typically occur just prior to the event in question;• removal of immediate causes may do little to prevent similar events from reoccurring because the bigger factors are still in place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• are usually less obvious and more difficult to identify;• are often a broader underlying belief, condition, or practice and not tied to a single event;• removal of an underlying cause may help avoid a similar event from occurring.

¹ Taken from *Heaven & Hell on Earth: The Massacre of the “Black” Donnellys*, part of the Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History series: www.canadianmysteries.ca