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Who's to blame? That's all I ask. That's all most of us ask. Own up. Give us the name of the person, or persons, whose oversight or misjudgment led to a snafu. We'll be grateful.

It sounds like a simple request, doesn't it?

It isn't. Blame is a watery concept in today's world, where it's been diluted by the exculpatory deflections of modern life -- by hazy sociology ("I'm a victim of my bad upbringing"), by the ass-covering two-step of bureaucracy ("I don't have the authorization to comment") and by legal hair-splitting ("I did not knowingly commit said crime/error/lapse of judgment").

An industry populated by lawyers, publicists, media tutors and flak catchers now thrives by keeping blame at arm's length, and it's ever harder to evade the thicket of stiff-arms to throw a tackle on the culpable.

For example, I tried to find out the following:

Who was responsible for TransLink's fleet of new trolley buses malfunctioning on Thursday? Who caused thousands of commuters to be stranded in cold weather?

I already knew what caused thousands of commuters to be stranded in cold weather, and why. A layer of ice and frost coated the power lines.

This led the sensors of the new "smart" trolleys to believe that there was not enough power in the system and the trolleys' poles disconnected from the lines.

Voila! A city comes smartly to a halt.

This was not the first time the new trolleys have given commuters and bus drivers fits. Customers have complained that the trolleys' low-floor profile -- designed to better accommodate wheelchairs and scooters -- have left them with far fewer seats, and that the design has meant a lack of vertical stanchions for passengers to brace themselves against when the trolleys brake.

Earlier this year, 39 of the new trolleys were pulled off the road for seven weeks when some of them momentarily lost their power steering. Their hydraulics had to be upgraded. Bus drivers themselves complained of an inordinate amount of

glare on the windshields at night -- requiring a rejigging of the interior lighting -- while bike riders found they could not use the bike racks at night because they obscured the trolleys' headlights.

These were the simplest of design flaws that should have been rectified before delivery.

But something as innocuous as frost bringing a trolley fleet to a standstill? I mean, c'mon! Didn't someone test for such conditions?

On Thursday, when Sun reporter Kelly Sinoski interviewed Stan Sierpina, vice-president of customer service for Coast Mountain Bus, which operates TransLink's trolley fleet, Sierpina blamed "unique weather circumstances" on the breakdown -- "unique" being, I presume, anything other than room temperature. Let me paraphrase Sierpina's explanation of events:

"Don't blame us! Blame that bitch, Mother Nature!"

Which, to me, sounds like a deflection of Man's place in the cosmos, like a protagonist in a Greek tragedy blaming the gods for his fate.

But Mother Nature doesn't design buses: Men do. And trolleys coming to a halt isn't an act of God: It's the result, through a series of decisions and oversights, that men had not prevented. Someone was to blame.

So I phoned Winnipeg and was connected with Glenn Asham, New Flyer's chief financial officer, and asked him about the trolleys' malfunction. He said, curtly, before hanging up:

"The buses have been built to the customer's specifications. So I have no comment on that."

In other words, he was saying:

"Don't blame me, I just follow orders."

So I contacted Ken Hardie, TransLink's communication officer. His e-mail, in part, to me:

"The new trolleys have summer and winter settings for this function, and yesterday's issue may simply be a matter of calibrating the winter setting . . . we will know more as the engineers' review is done.

"These units were designed in Winnipeg and Germany, where they are no strangers to snow and ice. However, we and our predecessor companies have had technical glitches with every last piece

of new technology that has been introduced for the past 50 years or longer. Once identified, the problem is fixed and the vehicles provide many years of service."

Well, okay, but who's responsible for calibrating the winter settings? Who decided to accept delivery of 228 trolleys, costing close to \$275 million, that go comatose at zero centigrade? Who, I asked him over the phone, do you blame for leaving thousands of commuters out in the cold?

"Blame?" he said. "Don't blame anybody. This is not an issue of blame. With new technology, stuff happens."

Stuff happens. It's out of our hands. God's will be done.

We live in a blameless world. If you choose to think otherwise the next time you've stood at a bus stop for an hour without catching sight of a trolley, don't blame me: I'm just the messenger.