

THE INDUSTRIAL SAFETY MOVEMENT

Enthusiasm—an interest in safety. (A full discussion is given in Chapter 7, "Maintaining Employee Interest in Safety.")

Acceleration of the drive for safety

The industrial safety movement swept the great industries of the nation in the years between the two world wars.

World War II heightened and intensified the safety drive. Conservation of manpower became a watchword. The federal government encouraged widespread safety activities among its contractors large and small. Safety personnel were hastily trained to deal with the tremendous expansion of the industrial plant.

The postwar period brought no retreat from well-considered safety activity. Old-line leaders of industry, as well as newcomers to the top ranks, were converted to the safety viewpoint of the handful of 1912.

In 1948, for example, Admiral Ben Moreell, then president of Jones and Laughlin Steel Corporation, wrote.

"Although safe and healthful working conditions can be justified on a cold dollars-and-cents basis, I prefer to justify them on the basic principle that it is the right thing to do. In discussing safety in industrial operations, I have often heard it stated that the cost of adequate health and safety measures would be prohibitive and that 'we can't afford it.'"

"My answer to that is quite simple and quite direct. It is this: 'If we can't afford safety, we can't afford to be in business.'"

Efforts by federal and state governments in the industrial safety field have progressed beyond mere legislation and enforcement. A series of national and state industrial safety conferences, which brought together interested parties on all fronts, have been useful in helping to promote safety more widely than ever before.

A by-product of organized safety activity has been increased interest in safety engineering on the part of schools of higher learning. A number of schools now offer advanced courses in this subject, and are contributing to a higher standard of knowledge among professionals in the field.

The World War II labor shortage dramatically brought home to management the magnitude and seriousness of the problem of off-the-job accidents to industrial employees.

Interest in off-the-job safety has been heightened in recent years by the passage of

numerous state laws on compulsory insurance which, in effect, make the employer financially responsible for all illnesses and injuries to workers, whether they originate on or off the job. Today, an increasing number of employers are including off-the-job safety in their overall safety program.

From the earliest days of industrial safety work, it has never been possible to make a clear separation between health and accident hazards. Is dermatitis an accident or a disease? What about hernias and heart trouble? Inevitably, there have been interest and activity on the part of safety men in many health problems that are on the borderline between diseases and accidents. Over the years, an increasingly effective organized co-operation between medical and safety men has developed in these areas.

In 50 years, the organized safety movement has grown in stature from the concern of a handful of enthusiasts to a powerful and constructive force.

Accomplishments

In any movement of social progress, there are many factors which must be considered in evaluating the usefulness of the effort.

In evaluating the work of the safety movement, particularly, a complex set of

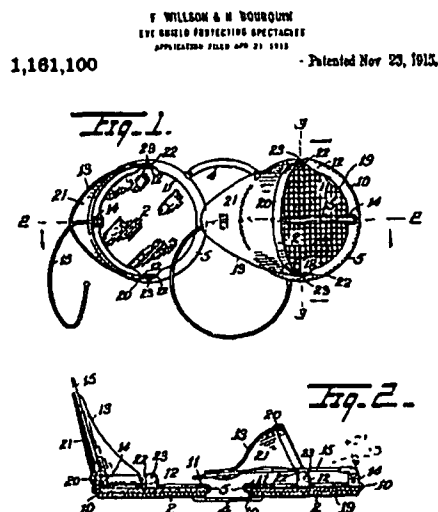


Fig. 1-7. Protective spectacles patented in 1915 had removable folding side shields.