

9—Safety Training

from the conferees, and sum up their conclusions. As is desirable in a participation class, the number of people in a conference group should be small enough that free discussion can occur.

The leader's part is mainly that of asking questions that will provoke thinking and discussion. Learning can take place in a conference if the conferees have a background of experience that enables them to discuss the subject intelligently.

Problem-solving conferences

Since a conference is a device for getting a job done, it is particularly useful in an area like safety where many people are involved. A conference yields big returns in education for all who participate, even though its immediate purpose is to solve a current problem, not merely a hypothetical one.

Frequently, the safety professional has problems relating to the operation of the safety program which he needs to discuss with production supervisors. The problem may have to do with the occurrence of a number of similar accidents, with some new feature of the safety program, with a new type of work to be undertaken, with a method of operation or plan to be worked out, or with any other subject in which both the foremen and the safety department are interested. To find a solution to the problem, the safety professional may call a conference with a group of supervisors.

The conference leader should be familiar with the relationships of the members of the conference and with the general area of the subject matter.

It is of the utmost importance that the leader and members of the conference know the scope and limitations of what they are expected to do. If, for example, a conference is called to decide how to put into practice a policy or a directive that has been issued, the members should understand that it is not within their authority to have the policy or directive changed. If they meet to discuss improvement of procedures for the elimination of a hazard, they should know whether or not they may consider extensive alternations of buildings and installation of new machinery. If they do not know the limitations within which they must work, then the conference

becomes a source of dissatisfaction and frustration or is regarded as simply play-acting.

If the job of a conference group is to recommend action and they do recommend action, they should, of course, know what becomes of their recommendation.

Often, however, a conference group will discuss a matter that affects only the members, in which case their conclusions are drawn for their own guidance. This is probably the most usual and most satisfactory kind of conference.

Conference leading

Every safety professional and supervisor should attempt to become a skilled conference leader. Since such skill comes mainly from practice, he should accept opportunities for holding conferences even if he has not had a great deal of experience. The application of good sense and an understanding of what a conference is supposed to accomplish will go far toward making the conference successful.

The sequence of conference leading is as follows:

- 1 The leader states the problem.
- 2 He attempts to break the problem into segments to keep the discussion orderly.
- 3 He encourages free discussion.
- 4 He makes sure that members have given adequate consideration to all the significant points raised.
- 5 He notes any conclusions that are reached.
- 6 He states the final conclusion in such a way that it truly represents the findings of the group.

One who attends many conferences has opportunities to observe examples of successful and unsuccessful conference leading. This should help him when he assumes the role of conference leader. The new leader should also seek help from training people and others who may give him sound advice on making his conferences productive.

Misuse of the conference method

If a conference leader, in his eagerness to get across his ideas or in order to cover ground quickly, departs from true conference procedures and steers the discussion in the way