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315

The Growing Importance of Industrial Hygiene

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Industry can feel justly proud of the Industrial Hygiene Foundation. It is encouraging to me that in an era when the expansive grasp of government is reaching out to regulate and control more and more phases of economic life, there is a voluntary nongovernmental research organization to turn to on problems of environmental engineering. The Industrial Hygiene Foundation not only conducts surveys and carries on research for dealing with these sensitive matters, but it also works hand in hand with many companies, applying its wealth of knowledge and scientific skills to their everyday problems.

The Foundation, staffed by people of high professional caliber, has a strong impact on

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21

the industrial community through its educational courses, seminars, meetings, reports, and publications. Its history is in itself an impressive record of the changing concept of occupational health practice and of the progress made by industry as a whole and particularly by those companies affiliated with the Foundation. This Foundation has well earned the support of industrial management.

Industrial hygiene today, concerned as it is with man, animals, property, and vegetation, is awesome in scope and challenging in responsibility. Its pattern over the years has been transformed from one of curative medicine to that of prevention of occupational illness, injury, and damage.

With changing times and the dynamic growth of industrial, political, economic, and social life, industrial hygiene needs have become very complex and have evolved into matters of grave responsibility for anyone who has created employment. Today, thousands of people work together in concentrated areas; machinery and materials of production are complex and ever changing. A multitude of laws and rulings regulate employer and employee, and the whole atmosphere of industrial activity is under the constant scrutiny of government and public alike.

The need for an industrial hygiene program becomes even more evident in the light of the demands made by industry's new environment, the medically enlightened but apprehensive public, the broadened compensation rulings for medical disorders and their effect on the employer, and the increased union and governmental activities in occupational medicine and hygiene.

Success in this field requires that management fully understands the scope and importance of industrial hygiene, the need for a well-planned program, and the benefits which can be achieved. Every such program should have realistic, attainable goals spelled out in terms of better employee and community relationships, actual savings in dollars and cents, and the proper fulfillment by a corporation of its role as good citizens.

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The scope of a program of industrial hygiene can be tailored by using as guidelines the number of employees involved, the nature of the work, the availability of qualified medical hygiene personnel, and the time and money allotted to the program.

A most important primary step is for management to make its endorsement of an industrial hygiene program known throughout the company so that all workers are aware of the interest and support backing the effort. Next, the atmosphere and contacts which form the over-all environment created by the very existence of the work site must be examined and understood. Within a plant there are many potential environmental health hazards ranging from light, toxic chemicals, noise, temperature, and vibration to the very important psychological relationships existing among employees.

Industry's responsibility in our culture is not confined to the welfare of people at the work site alone. Today, there is concern with everything emanating from the plant with which people may be in contact. Industry must realize that anything emitted into the air and the water, as well as products which emerge from the plant, may carry potential health hazards. Thousands of difficulties have arisen from smoke and fumes, from water pollution, and from other atmospheric contaminants and elements, resulting from industrial production.

While such a wide scope of responsibility is staggering, it presents no challenge that cannot be overcome by a management willing to take direct action wherever possible while overseeing the job to fulfillment. This requires a constant surveillance of man and his environment. The environmental factors must be recognized, measured, and thoroughly understood and, where necessary, controlled and changed to meet adequate health standards. To do this, it is necessary to have qualified industrial hygienists oversee the program. The industrial hygienist's job is to study all aspects of every potential environmental health hazard. Working closely with the plant doctor, nurse, safety engineer, production people, and other personnel whose

jobs are associated with occupational health problems, the industrial hygienist must constantly maintain a 2-way channel of communication with all of them. The industrial hygienist should collect and analyze the thinking of others and make sound recommendations to management based on such over-all knowledge and experience.

Perhaps the heart of an industrial hygiene program in the preventive sense is the building of a constant awareness of existent potential hazards. Because everyone at a work site is involved with atmosphere and contacts, this awareness can only be built up through mass employee communication. Industrial hygiene should be stressed in training programs, house organs, letters to employees, meetings, bulletin boards, and by any other communication methods used to reach the various levels of company personnel.

The attitude of every employee is conditioned by the way in which he gets along with others and especially with those who supervise his work. Healthy attitudes built on happy relationships can do much to improve the working atmosphere for all while lessening the threat of environmental health hazards. Management is well advised to train its supervisory people in human relations.

Every enlightened management should scrutinize industrial hygiene aspects very closely before making decisions such as the selection of new plant sites, changes in plant processes, and additions to and relocations within present plant areas. It is of utmost importance that all problems regarding environment and contact be referred to properly qualified personnel who should be authorized to handle them.

Study, plan, and action are as important outside of the plant and in the community as they are at the work site. A constant watch for actual and potential trouble spots with strong concentration on preventive measures is the key. Out-of-plant problems offer many opportunities for cooperative research where other companies, industries, and foundations are linked together in a common interest. Such cooperative ventures are especially helpful for companies which lack

the money and manpower to cope with problems on their own.

There are in existence several governmental agencies specifically set up to work in the field of industrial hygiene. Many of these agencies have already done extensive and costly research and can lend competent help and sage advice to industry. Certainly their resources should be thoroughly considered and utilized to the fullest extent. While considering government as a partner in this work, most of the standards by which a company's industrial hygiene program must operate up to now have been government-made. These rules are established primarily by legislation, commission ruling, and court decision. To maintain a position of sovereignty with the power of checks and balances against the ever increasing rule of government, it is essential to work out problems on an individual basis or in concert with other private interests. Failing this, authority will be surrendered to the government, and the future will see a centralized control in which we have little voice.

There are several ways of helping to insure private enterprise in this field. Since so many rules are created by legislators and commissions, it is extremely important that industry keep such authoritative people fully informed so that whatever standards are set will be realistic and based on first-hand knowledge of the problems involved. Whenever possible, industry should encourage its knowledgeable people to serve on commissions working for the benefit of industry. The voice of industry can be heard in this way and its interests well represented.

In the days ahead—when all signs seem to point to an even greater growth of industry

and technology, the forces of environment and contact threaten to become even more complex and challenging. One evidence of this growing complexity is seen in the health and safety clause which is now being written into many union contracts. In essence, this clause gives a worker the right to walk off a job if he feels that working conditions are unsafe or unhealthy. Thus, it strongly behooves management to plan for a healthy wholesome working environment. If management does not, the government will.

If no industrial hygiene program exists, industry has no rapport with its employees or with the community in this most important phase of relationship—health and its preservation. Without a sound plan, compensation hazards mount with consequent rising losses in time, money, and morale.

An employer has an obligation to provide a safe and healthful atmosphere for those he hires and should be solicitous toward the effect his working site has on the surrounding community. Any industrial hygiene program, to be successful, should be on an individual basis, tailored to the particular needs and problems of the location involved. In the long run, industry will be a major beneficiary of such a plan.

There are many more factors in this wide scope of contact and environment. Today, industrial health is an integral part of management's and employees' concern. It demands a plan of action; it promises a profit in realistic benefits; it challenges all of industry to accept a distinct obligation, and warns that if it is forsaken the price of default is rigid governmental control.

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