The safety engineer A representative of the safety department should verify the findings of the foreman and make an investigation of every important accident for his own information, and in most cases he should make a written report to the proper official or to the general safety committee

Nowhere are the safety engineer's value and ability better shown than in the investigation of an accident His specialized training and analytical experience enable him to search for all the facts, apparent and hidden, and to submit a report free from bias or prejudice He has no interest in the investigation other than to get information which can be used to prevent a similar accident

The workmen's safety committee In some companies, one function of the workmen's safety committee is to investigate and report on all serious accidents This function is particularly important where a contributing factor was an unsafe act on the part of the worker

If this committee, composed of the injured employee's fellow workmen, investigates the accident immediately, finds that the injured man did engage in an unsafe act which contributed to the accident, and so reports to the general safety committee or to other authority, and if this report is then publicized, it will be more generally accepted among the workers than a similar report made by the supervisor or the safety professional

On the other hand, many companies disagree strongly with this concept of the duties of the workmen's safety committee, believing that the task of assigning responsibility for an accident is sometimes an unpleasant one and should not be foisted upon workers

The general safety committee. In many companies, especially those of small or moderate size, all safety activities are headed by a general safety committee, one of whose activities is accident investigation Ordinarily, such investigation would be handled in a routine manner, but in important cases the chairman might call an extra meeting of the committee to conduct a special investigation

Safety committees are discussed in detail in Chaper 2, "Organization and Committees "

Board of inquiry In federal services, a board of inquiry is appointed by a military commander to determine the facts behind an accident, to prepare a formal report within a specified time, and to make recommendations

Cases to be Investigated

An accident that causes death or serious injury obviously should be thoroughly investigated The "near-accident" that might have caused death or serious injury is equally important from the safety standpoint and should be investigated, e g , the breaking of a crane hook or a scaffold rope, or an explosion associated with a pressure vessel

Each investigation should be made as soon after the accident as possible A delay of only a few hours may permit important evidence to be destroyed or removed, intentionally or unintentionally Also, the results of the inquiry should be made known quickly, inasmuch as their publicity value in the safety education of employees and supervisors is greatly increased by promptness

Any epidemic of minor injuries demands study A particle of emery in the eye or a scratch from handling sheet metal may be a very simple case, the immediate cause may be obvious, and the loss of time may not exceed a few minutes However, if cases of this or any other type occur frequently in the plant, or in any one department, an investigation should be made to determine the underlying causes

The chief value of such an investigation lies in uncovering contributing causes The energetic safety engineer or manager is constantly alive to the advantage of this kind of accident investigation, which may prove more valuable, though less spectacular, than the "inquest" following a fatal injury

Fairness and impartiality are absolutely essential The value of the investigation is largely destroyed if there is any suspicion that its purpose is to place the blame or pass the buck No one should be assigned to investigation work unless he has earned a reputation for fairness and is experienced in gathering evidence It should be made quite clear that accident investigations are conducted entirely for the purpose of obtaining information which will help to prevent recurrence of accidents