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A Safety Program in the Lumber Industry

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The importance of a safety program has in the past been stressed by many of the country's leading industrialists. In fact, many of these leading industrialists have risen to high ranks due to their deep understanding and regard for the humans who work for and with them to produce their product or source of income. In order to understand more clearly why prevention of accidents is a mutual and basic problem to both employer and employee, the following discussion of the losses due to accidents will be given.

By far the greatest loss due to any accident is the loss of human life or suffering caused. This suffering or loss of life directly affects all members of the injured's family as well as his friends. His family has to go without those essentials of living that are obtainable only when the employee is working full time and drawing a regular pay check. If his injury is severe, he may never be able to go back to his regular job if he can return at all, but may have to take a job which pays less. In case of death, the injured's family must rely on the compensation paid by the company under the state's compensation laws or supplement this compensation by their own earnings.

It is difficult to measure the loss of accidents to an industrial firm. This is due to the involved effect of reduced production caused by the knowledge of accidents to their uninjured employees. When an employee is injured, those men who work with him immediately realize that they too may be in danger and naturally they begin to worry about themselves as the next possible victim. This causes them to

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FIG. 1A

FIG. 1B

FIG. 1. A, Steel bands used to package lumber, constitute a hazard to walking workmen when scattered in a pile such as this. B, Contrast this pile of bands when they are taken from loads preserves them for future use as well as reducing the chances that some workman will fall over them.

work with less efficiency than they normally have and actually they become subject to accidents themselves. Such a reaction is normal and though it may not be detectable, it does exist. Moreover, this reaction, natural to all men, remains for several days in the department in which a man was injured.

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Compensation paid injured men is the most common measuring device used to determine what accidents cost. Compensation in most states is based on the past earnings of those injured and usually amounts to between 50 and 60 percent of his earnings during the thirty days previous to his accident. From this it is easily seen that the company and the injured share in the direct financial loss due to the accident. The company must pay a premium to the organization which carried their compensation insurance and this premium is based on their past experience in numbers and severity of accidents, while the injured receives only a percentage of his normal earnings. It has been estimated that the actual loss to a company is from five to ten times the compensation paid to those injured by the insuring agent. This figure has been established by the National Safety Council through analysis of many years of industrial accidents by all types of industries in the country. This loss is based on the fact that accidents result in lower efficiency of workers who associate with the injured both in the plant and at home, breakage of materials and equipment due to the mechanical causes of the accident, the loss of work resulting in the replacement of the injured by a less experienced man, etc. This gives in brief, why the subject of safe working has interested most of the industrial companies of the country. President Roosevelt recently gave in one statement the results of accidents to our country's productivity. This statement was contained in a proclamation to the country on Safety First in which he stressed that in 1940, the productive ability of 100,000 men for one year was lost due to accidents.

The Southwest Lumber Mills, Inc., first took cognizance of the cost of accidents when the compensation paid to their injured totaled $35,000 in one year. This figure alone was enough to indicate that a definite safety program should be formulated and placed in their production and management organization. The first step toward organizing for safety was the establishment of a general safety committee. From this committee one man was chosen to be chairman or safety director. The responsibility of the committee is to formulate a workable program of Education, Engineering and Enforce-
FIG. 2A

FIG. 2B

FIG. 2. A, A littered lumber yard alley such as this causes a serious hazard to men working in it. Also, a littered workplace or department indicates a possible lack of efficient supervision. B, This picture illustrates why it is so necessary to pile lumber correctly and carefully. Had a workman stood near the walkway which was covered by this spilled load, a serious if not fatal accident would have resulted.

ment of the principles of safe working. The duties of the safety director are to call meetings of the committee, collect statistics of the company's current and accumulative accident experience, act as an advisor or help any department supervisor in carrying out the safety campaign among his men and

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do the general coordinating between the company's supervisors and management officials.

The general requirements of any safety program are usually considered as the three E's of safety, namely Education, Engineering and Enforcement. To develop these three general fundamentals within the company's production schedules and then weave them into a workable pattern is the job of the general safety committee and safety director. It is a job that must have the interest, attention and cooperation of all key men in the organization to obtain maximum results. Without this personal interest of everyone concerned, the program will not succeed. The methods for promoting these fundamentals have been written about by many safety engineers, supervisors, industrial leaders and others. Some stress education as the biggest factor while others think that engineering is the answer and so on. Actually, in any organization, the ideas for promoting the welfare of individual workers exists in abundance among the workmen themselves, and if these ideas are ferreted out and used, the operation will be a comparatively safe one.

The general methods of educating the working man in the principles of safe working are the same as those used in any selling program. To do this, we advertise our product of safety by the use of posters throughout the operations, publish bulletins explaining the causes of accidents to the men on the job, talk to them individually about their unsafe or safe working habits and hold safety talks before entire departments. We also have slogan contests whereby the best judged safety slogan wins a prize for its writer. We develop competition between departments or give a safety bonus award to the men depending on the number of man hours they work, subtracting from their bonus when they have a lost time accident. These and many other ways are used to create interest in our safety program. As in the functions of the general safety committee, however, these methods of arousing and maintaining interest are only as effective as is the interest given the program by the key men and supervisors within the departments.

The fundamental of safe engineering of all machinery and
other equipment is truly a basic one in any plant which seeks a good safety record. In the lumber industry as well as most others, methods of production have changed more rapidly than has the redesigning of plant arrangement. Thus the desire for more production out of existing equipment and arrangement within buildings is always greater than the actual productive ability of these newly changed arrangements. As a result, men are pushed past their capacities, in many cases, without the protection offered by correct engineering. From this, one might think that a new plant which is engineered to the latest methods of production and equipped with the newest and best machinery would be free from all possibilities of accidents. This is of course, not true since we still have the human element to consider and the safest piece of equipment can cause an accident if the operator does not work the safe way. But if all equipment or arrangement of working space is engineered with the safety of the workmen in mind when installed and is brought up to safe standards as production ratios are increased, the main problem of engineering for safety will have been solved.

When considering enforcement of safety principles, we always consider that if a man seems incurable of his fault of not working safely, he is probably on the wrong job. It is quite safe to say that only a very small percentage of men with long accident records actually are always carelessly getting hurt. For this reason, enforcement is not practiced as the word suggests. Rather than trying to discipline an apparently continually careless worker, our usual practice is to transfer him after he is judged incapable of working safely on his particular job. But enforcement by educating all workmen in the general safe practices of their jobs is the duty of every foreman. It is the duty of each foreman to know how his men can work safely and to get this knowledge to them whenever he discovers any man not knowing the correct and safe way in which to work.

We do not believe that the results of our safety program are beyond criticism since our attempts to curtail the unnecessary waste of human effort and money arising from accidents have been in effect only a comparatively short time.

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Our organized program is now in its fifth year and in that time it has not developed into the smooth working organization which is desired. Such an organization comes only after the "Gospel of Safety" has been instilled into every supervisor as well as all workmen. However, the results to date do show that much good has been gained out of the program. This statement can be illustrated by the following comparative figures: In 1937 our direct cost of accidents based on compensation paid those injured amounted to $2.3c per man hour of operation. By 1939 this cost was reduced to $4.10c per man hour operated, 1920 $0.50c per man hour and in 1941 $0.07 per man hour. These figures are taken from the statistics of the McNary operations alone since these units are the only ones which have been included in the safety program since its inception.

During this coming year and the years to follow after it, accident prevention will become an increasingly important part of this company's production and management organization. At the present time when our country is at war, we have an increased obligation to reduce accidents and increase production with the manpower and efficiency saved. This is, and will continue to become, a harder job for all supervisors due to the increased necessity for employing inexperienced men, the lack of sufficient well trained and experienced supervisors and other changes necessary to speed up normal production to satisfy our war needs.

The solution to this problem is sincere cooperation by all men, and the result will be greater production with less losses due to accidents.