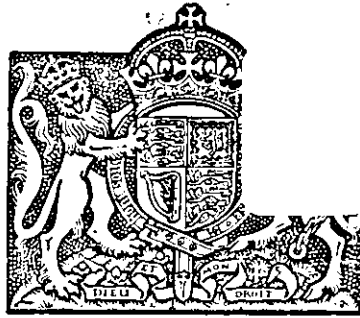


THE PERSONAL FACTOR IN ACCIDENTS



MEDICAL RESEARCH COUNCIL
INDUSTRIAL HEALTH RESEARCH BOARD

THE PERSONAL FACTOR IN ACCIDENTS

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I

TERMS OF REFERENCE

(*Revised 1942*)

To advise and assist the Medical Research Council in promoting scientific investigations into problems of health among workers, including occupational and environmental factors in the causation of ill-health and disease, and the relation of methods and conditions of work to the functions and efficiency of body and mind ; and in making known such results of these researches as are capable of useful application to practical needs.

PREFACE

The Industrial Health Research Board is part of the organisation of the Medical Research Council (under the Committee of Privy Council for Medical Research). It was formerly called the Industrial Fatigue Research Board and was first appointed in direct succession to the Committee on the Health of Munition Workers, set up during the war of 1914-18. A general summary of the Board's investigations between two wars, particularly in so far as they have immediate applicability to the war effort, is given in Emergency Report No. 1 (H.M. Stationery Office, 1940; reprinted 1941). Emergency Report No. 2, dealing with questions of hours of work, lost time and labour wastage, was published in 1942. In the preface to that report an extract was given from the Twenty-first Report (Session 1940-41) of the Select Committee on National Expenditure, in which it was recommended that the Board during the war should "work in the closest co-operation with the Production Departments, should advise them, and should be strengthened so as to be able to carry out investigations on a wide scale into the main problems of industrial health and efficiency". This recommendation was endorsed in the comments made on behalf of H.M. Government, which were published in the Twenty-fifth Report of the Select Committee and, as a step towards its implementation, the Medical Research Council have since reconstituted the Board on a wider basis and with the revised terms of reference given on p. ii; it will be seen that these relate not only to the physiological and psychological aspects of industrial health and environment but also—to a greater extent than previously—to the prevention and relief of illness resulting from the particular health hazards to which industrial workers may be exposed.

Both the former and the present terms of reference of the Board stress the necessity for making widely known—in industry and elsewhere—the results of such completed researches as are capable of useful application to practical needs, and the present series of Emergency Reports is directed to that end. In some cases, as in this instance, they are based on work which has been published *in extenso* in earlier Reports of the Board, and the aim has been to state the conclusions as simply as possible, with a minimum of technical detail, so that their practical implications may be easily understood by a reader without specialised knowledge.

The importance of efforts to lessen the number of accidents on the roads and in industry hardly needs emphasis, and the following pages indicate the personal factors which need to be considered in this regard. The statistical establishment of "accident proneness" as an unfortunate characteristic of a section of mankind—and the finding that this is to some extent predictable by psychological tests—is due largely to original researches by former and present members of the Board's staff. Much remains to be done from the point of view of increasing the scope and efficiency of the tests, and the Board's investigators hope for opportunities to extend their researches, in respect of some of the bigger industries under war conditions. Such studies of the personal factor in accidents should be an effective and powerful ancillary to the preventive and protective regulations of the Ministry of Labour and National Service, and to the valuable propaganda of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, now part of the Ministry's organisation. Safety Regulations and propaganda necessarily relate to the conditions and dangers to which groups of operatives, or, it may be, the whole population are exposed. The personal studies discussed

in Part II of this report deal, instead, with the particular case of the worker who—intrinsically and through no fault of his own—may be a danger to himself or others under certain conditions, and the chief object of the studies described is to find means of diagnosing his failing in advance so that he may be transferred to a safer type of work before his misfortune has manifested itself in a serious accident to himself or to others. The application of the psychological tests necessarily demands trained personnel, who may not always be available, but it is pointed out that the accident prone may often be identified by the simpler expedient of a careful system of accident records, since those who have many minor accidents also tend to have major ones. Suggestions as to how these records should be kept are given in the report ; and if its publication stimulates interest in the matter and leads to a better system of industrial record keeping in regard to accidents, and to the consequent transfer of those shown to be accident prone to tasks involving a lesser degree of danger, it will represent a noteworthy step towards the solution of an urgent problem of to-day.

28th July, 1942