HEALTH AND SAFETY IN THE ATOMIC ENERGY AUTHORITY

THE report of the Committee appointed under the chairmanship of Sir Alexander Fleck to review the organization of the Atomic Energy Authority as a whole for the control of health and safety* begins by describing the measures which the Committee considers essential. Safe technological practice, it believes, involves: (*a*) formulating codes of practice for design and operation based on experimental facts and experience; the special problems of nuclear energy require that preparation of the codes should be the responsibility of specialist health and safety staff; (*b*) designing plant using these codes of practice; this is the responsibility of design engineers; (*c*) operating and maintaining the plant to these codes; the executive responsibility for this rests with the works general manager and his operating staff; (*d*) overall monitoring of both design and operations by the safety staff, whose duty it is to direct the attention of the executive authority to any lapse from the prescribed codes.

The report next considers the functions of Government departments in this field and, after defining the Authority's role in relation to health and safety measures, the Authority's organization against this background. The national implications of the acute shortage of specialist health and safety staff in the field of nuclear energy to which the report directs attention, and the recommendations of the Committee in this connexion, and in regard to the Authority's external relations and responsibilities, are discussed elsewhere (p. 1023 of this issue). The internal recommendations are summarized below.

The Fleck Committee endorses the Authority's decision to establish a committee of the Atomic Energy Executive to be responsible for the overall supervision of all matters of health and safety, but recommends some minor changes in the terms of reference. It considers that the new committee structure established under the Executive Committee on Health and Safety provides an effective means of controlling health and safety throughout the Authority. Recommended terms of reference for the subordinate Weapons Safety Executive Committee, Safety Executive Committee and Health Executive Committee are suggested. It also recommends that the management of health and safety in the factories of the Industrial Group should be fully integrated into a single section responsible directly to the works general manager and endorses the new health and safety organization at Risley and the concept of an Authority Safety Branch which it contains. This organization, it is suggested, should be brought up to strength as a matter of urgency, and detailed terms of reference for the Industrial Group Health and Safety Branch are suggested covering the preparation of codes of practice, and provision of a medical service, radiological safety service and industrial safety service at each site, and provision of an independent inspection service.

The Committee recommends that there should be one senior member of the scientific staff at the Radiochemical Centre, whose principal duty would be functional responsibility to the manager for all safety matters. Existing members of the staff should be given this duty on a rota basis, and a first task of the new safety officer should be to investigate storage arrangements for radioactive materials. It is also recommended that the Authority should bring the site emergency procedures in each of its establishments to a uniformly high standard. The procedures should be co-ordinated to ensure that the maximum technical resources of the whole Authority may be deployed to counter an emergency in any single establishment. Finally, there should be closer collaboration between the Authority's three Groups on the problems concerned with the control of criticality, and each Group should have a nominated officer to bear functional responsibility for criticality problems.

* Atomic Energy Office. Report of the Committee appointed by the Prime Minister to examine the Organisation for Control of Health and Safety in the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority. Pp. 28. (Cmnd. 342.) (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1958.) 1*s.* 3*d.* net.

INDUSTRIAL HEALTH IN GREAT BRITAIN

THE annual report* of the Chief Inspector of Factories for 1956 records a reduction of 2 per cent in the number of accidents, from 163,332 in 1955 to 160,116, although the estimated number employed in factories increased by 0·4 per cent. The downward trend in the accident rate per thousand employed continued, as did the fatality rate per million employed (54), the number of fatal accidents in factories being 426; and of 184,785 accidents notified during the year from all premises subject to the Factories Acts, 687 were fatal. The Chief Inspector observes that probably greater efforts have never been made than during the past year to reduce the risk of accidents due to fire, and these efforts, which are part of a continuing campaign carried out by the inspectorate, other Ministries, local authorities, fire services and various organizations, have been intensified, and co-operation between the authorities and services has been strengthened and extended.

The cardinal importance of the contribution of the scientist and technologist to health and safety in industry is again apparent from this report. Thus, reviewing progress on safety, the report stresses four aspects, in all of which that contribution is decisive. First, the need to design for safety. Secondly, the tendency for electrical and electronic apparatus to be included where formerly reliance was placed only on a mechanical system of control. Thirdly, and in consequence, greater reliability is required of such apparatus to ensure the safety of operators, since

* Ministry of Labour and National Service. Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories for the year 1956. Pp. 195. (Cmnd. 329.) (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1958.) 9*s.* 6*d.* net.