



Online Ethics Center
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

Occupational Health

Author(s)

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Year

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Description

Don Hayward is employed as a chemical engineer at ABC Manufacturing. Although he does not work with hot metals himself, he supervises workers who are exposed to hot metals eight hours a day, five days a week. Don becomes concerned when several workers develop respiratory problems and complain about "those bad smelling fumes from the hot metals". When Don asks his superior, Cal Brundage, about air quality in the workplace, the reply is that the workplace is in full compliance with OSHA guidelines.

Abstract

This case is one of thirty-two cases which address a wide range of ethical issues that can arise in engineering practice provided by the Center For the Study of Ethics in Society, Western Michigan University.

Body

Don Hayward is employed as a chemical engineer at ABC Manufacturing. Although he does not work with hot metals himself, he supervises workers who are exposed to hot metals eight hours a day, five days a week. Don becomes concerned when several workers develop respiratory problems and complain about "those bad smelling fumes from the hot metals". When Don asks his superior, Cal Brundage, about air quality in the workplace, the reply is that the workplace is in full compliance with OSHA guidelines. However, Don also learns that OSHA guidelines do not apply to chemicals that have not been tested. A relatively small percentage of chemicals in the workplace have actually been tested. This is also the case with the vast majority of chemicals workers are exposed to at ABC.

Should Don do anything further, or should he simply drop the matter?



Don goes to ABC's science library, talks to the reference librarian about his concerns, and does a literature search to see if he can find anything that might be helpful in determining why the workers have developed respiratory problems. He finds the title of an article that looks promising and asks the reference librarian to send for a copy. The librarian tells Don that the formal request must have the signed approval of Cal Brundage.

Don fills out the request form and sends it to Cal's office for approval. One month later the article has still not arrived. Don asks Cal about the request. Cal replies that he doesn't recall ever seeing it. He tells Don that it must have gotten "lost in the shuffle." Don fills out another form and this time personally hands it to Cal. Cal says he will send it to the reference librarian right away.

Another month passes by and the article has not arrived. Don mentions his frustration to the reference librarian. He replies that he never received a request from Cal.

What should Don do now?

Notes

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Use of Materials on the OEC

Resource Type

Case Study / Scenario

Parent Collection

Cases for Teaching Engineering Ethics

Topics

Employer/Employee Relationships

Lab and Workplace Safety

Safety

Workplace Ethics

Discipline(s)

Chemical Engineering

Chemistry

Computer, Math, and Physical Sciences

Engineering

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Center for the Study of Ethics in Society at Western Michigan University