

August Newsletter

Welcome.

Welcome to our August newsletter.

Firstly, we are delighted to announce that Doug White has gained his Fellowship from the IMechE. Commenting on his application, the panel said "Doug's engineering career is one that many would give their right arm to have".

In the rest of the newsletter, there's a short review of our Expert Witness service, where we are called in as part of a legal case to provide a specialist engineering view and to help get to the truth.

Finally, in Doug's Digest this month, Doug shares his thoughts on the virtues of report writing - really!

Thanks for reading...

Expert Witness

We received a worried call from the manufacturer of a domestic wallpaper stripper who were being threatened with litigation - the product had exploded, scalding the owner. Neither the company or ourselves could find any obvious damage, so why should a seemingly faultless unit over-pressurize?



On investigation of the wallpaper stripper, the circumstances of the accident and the nature of the unfortunate operator's injuries (bad scalds up one arm), we found that it resulted from a combination of cold weather and a failure to read the instructions.

Having been stored in the garden shed, the steam pipe was full of ice (water from a previous usage) preventing steam flow to the head. Rather than checking the unit, finding and thawing the ice, the operator held the reservoir's pressure relief valve down to try to drive some steam to the heating head.

The manufacturer escaped litigation but they did act positively, the safety valve was redesigned to prevent anyone holding it down and the unfortunate operator received a new steamer.

Doug's Digest

Get it Write!

Do you remember that old cartoon with the toddler sitting on the potty with the caption "It's not over until the paperwork's done."?



I used to hate writing reports; doing the work was the fun bit; writing about a solved problem was unnecessary and tedious; I wanted to get on with the next problem. A few grey hairs later I have come to realize that reporting can be interesting (but I will not go quite so far as to say that it's fun).

It's the time when you are forced to marshal your thoughts; the time when, oops!, you realize that your logic has been faulty. But you don't want this to happen at the end, so a report should be written as the job progresses - why, oh why, does this never seem to happen? Well actually it does or, rather, it could: any engineer worth his salt knows, keeping a work diary is essential - making notes as the job progresses, those successes, those failures, those changes in direction. In fact, you are writing the report as you go.

My particular bête noire is the automated reporting produced by many modern analysis packages. By all means use it in the short term, but remember that in a little while no-one, yourself included, will understand what it means: page after page of numbers, pretty coloured figures which have too cryptic titles, viewed from an angle which obscures the important features. Never let the customer see one of these 'reports'; let it be quietly lost in your old working files.

A report is not written so that the final invoice can be submitted. It is written with a view to it being read years from now when someone will say, "Well, Bill did something similar a long while ago but I don't know how. He's retired, but he wrote good reports - I will soon be able to do it myself."

Doug

To Get In Touch

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