IEEE Cases 1999 - Air Bags

Author(s)

Stephen H. Unger

Year

1999

Description

A fictionalized case about an engineer who resigned rather than sign off on an ambiguous design.

Body

SafeComp is a company that, among other things, designs and makes sensing devices for automobile air bags. Bob Baines was hired to work in the quality control department. About six weeks after starting work, he was asked to sign off on a design that he felt very uncertain about. He checked with people involved in the design and found the situation, at best, ambiguous.

Bob told his manager that he would not feel right about signing off, and, since he was relatively inexperienced with SafeComp's procedures, asked that he not be required to do this. His manager kept applying pressure. Eventually, Bob decided that he wished neither to violate his principles by doing something that he thought was wrong, nor to become involved in a battle in which his career would certainly be major casualty. He quietly resigned. (For a little more information on this case, see the footnote(3)).

- (3)Stephen H. Unger, "Reality check: ethics and air bags", IEEE Institute,

August, 1998, p. 2.

Notes

Author: Stephen H. Unger, Columbia University.

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Rights

Use of Materials on the OEC

Resource Type

Case Study / Scenario

Topics

Public Well-being
Public Well-being
Employer/Employee Relationships
Social Responsibility

Discipline(s)

Engineering