

James J. Hall



To Jim De Bernardi
Bill Henry
Curry Miller
Al Sather
John Finkel
Keith Fogg

Date 2/16/79

I'll try to get some more info
on this NIOSH "study" at Carbide
& let you know -

A handwritten signature, likely of James J. Hall, consisting of stylized initials "JH" with a long, sweeping vertical line extending upwards from the "H".

VVC 000020501

The Houston Post

U.S. checking to see if deaths of workers linked to chemical

How the scare started/page 13A

By BILL INMAN
Post Reporter

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An unusually high number of workers at Union Carbide's Texas City plant died of a type of brain tumor that has been linked to the cancer-causing agent, vinyl chloride, federal health authorities confirmed Thursday.

The substance was once manufactured and is now processed at the large chemical and plastics plant.

A top Labor Department official said scientists associate the chemical with a cancerous tumor known as glioblastoma multiform.

The Houston Post has learned medical certificates from at least nine Texas City workers who died between 1962 and 1978 listed that type of tumor as the cause of death. About 455 death certificates have been examined thus far by health authorities.

In addition, federal authorities say, a 10th plant employee — still living — has

been diagnosed as "probably" having the same form of tumor.

Health records of current and former Texas City plant workers — 8,000 to 10,000 people — are being reconstructed for study by scientists working for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

Those records, which company officials describe as "sketchy" and "difficult to piece together," go back to 1941.

"The company feels this is not a crisis that poses any immediate exposure hazards for current employees," said plant manager Damon Engle Thursday. "Practically all of the affected employees worked for substantial periods of time from the mid-'40s through the present in a period in which neither the government nor the company had any reason to suspect vinyl chloride."

The company, he said, is "not yet ready" to assume vinyl chloride is responsible for the deaths, as OSHA suggests.

"We do think that if vinyl chloride should ultimately be implicated that OSHA and the industry should take

credit for recognizing hazards at this stage.

"Our plant has been in compliance and remains in compliance" with current chemical safety standards, he said.

The joint OSHA-NIOSH investigation was prompted by a worker complaint, said Eula Bingham, assistant secretary of labor for occupational safety and health in Washington.

The complaint was received at a local OSHA office Nov. 27 of last year and an investigation launched Dec. 13, Bingham said. A team of three scientists from NIOSH, two from OSHA and OSHA area technical personnel made the preliminary study.

"The company has proved to be very cooperative thus far in our joint study of this situation," Bingham noted.

The total number of brain tumors found so far "would appear to be higher than expected" at a plant like that at Texas City, which currently employs about 2,000 workers, and represents an "unusually high incidence" of such

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Deaths at plant probed

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deaths, Bingham said.

"It is too early and there are too many chemicals in use at the plant to reach any definitive correlation," Bingham said. The study would determine "the degree of risk workers may face" and the apparent "cause and causes of these tumors," Bingham said.

The findings represent only preliminary data, a company spokesman noted. Study results will not be available for months.

"We have an indication that NIOSH

wants to play a major role in the study," said Engle, noting the company's "own scientific staff" would also be made available.

Union Carbide this month sent its Texas City workers letters detailing the initial findings, he said.

"We told them not to be alarmed. There's a great deal of work yet to be done," Engle said.

Vinyl chloride is manufactured by dozens of chemical plants around the nation, including another Union Carbide plant in West Virginia. Company officials said records at that plant are being examined for a similar tumor pattern.