

Vinyl-chloride fumes found in sewer line

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Vinyl chloride has been found in a sewer line leading from the B. F. Goodrich Co. plant on Bells Lane to the Ohio River.

The chemical was discovered after men who were working on the large sewer line complained of fumes that burned their eyes and nauseated them.

P. H. Lawrence, plant manager at Goodrich, said the company has analyzed the fumes and has found "low concentrations" of vinyl chloride and other chemicals called acrylates.

He said the vinyl chloride could come only from the Goodrich plant, but the acrylates could come from any one of several different plastics plants in the vicinity.

Vinyl chloride is a substance used in making some plastics. It has been blamed for causing a rare form of liver cancer, angiosarcoma, which has killed at least six former workers at the B. F. Goodrich plant here. Acrylates are chemicals used or produced in the manufacture of several plastics.

Jack Wilburn, executive director of the Metropolitan Sewer District (MSD), told the district's board of the problem with the fumes yesterday.

Work on large sewer is delayed

He said the fumes had delayed work on the Southwestern Outfall sewer, a large storm-sewer line that leads directly to the Ohio River.

The sewer line, about 27 feet high and 18 feet wide, lies about 55 feet below ground. Originally, it carried raw sewage from the southwestern part of Louisville directly into the Ohio River.

Several years ago, the MSD installed a pumping station on the sewer line near Bells Lane and 41st Street.

Wilburn said this station normally pumps all of the MSD sewage out of the line and to the Morris Forman Sewage Treatment Plant on Bells Lane. The only time water gets by the pumping station and into the river, he said, is when a heavy rain dumps more water into the sewers than the pumps can handle.

Wilburn said the B. F. Goodrich Co. has a sewer line leading into the Southwestern Outfall sewer below the pumping station. The water from the Goodrich sewer flows through the MSD line and directly into the Ohio River, he said.

EPA requires gates

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is requiring the MSD to install large floodgates in the Southwestern Outfall line just downstream from the pumping station to keep Ohio River floodwaters from backing up into the pumping station.

Workmen discovered the fumes, Wilburn said, when they broke through the top of the sewer line to begin installing the gates.

Thomas J. McBride, an MSD engineer, said the sewer line normally is closed to the air. The outlet, he said, is below the level of the Ohio River. He said there were no complaints of the fumes until the workmen broke into the line.

Fumes flow through pipe

Even though the B. F. Goodrich sewer pipe is "downstream" from the site of the new gates, Wilburn said, the fumes flow back through the MSD pipe. He said the 55-foot shaft the workmen dug to get to the line acts as a chimney and draws the fumes upward.

Wilburn said the fumes are not constant, but seem to fill the sewer line at least once a day.

He said the workmen could see them coming as a "cloudy white mist."

The Munich Engineering Co., of Jeffersonville, which is doing the work on the sewer line, has asked the MSD for permission to delay the scheduled completion of the work.

In addition to the problem with the fumes, Wilburn said, the company is having a hard time getting the floodgates from the manufacturer.

The original deadline for completing the work was February 1975. Munich Engineering has asked the MSD to postpone the deadline to June 1975.

The MSD board decided yesterday to investigate further before granting the delay.

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