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Educational meetings held at Calvert

Labor, industry voice concern over chemical's link with cancer

By BOBBIE FOUST
T-C Staff Writer

CALVERT — Air pollution around Calvert City's industrial complex has recently been compared to that of Gary, Ind., a most unrealistic comparison, according to those familiar with both communities.

However, both labor and industry representatives have voiced concern over the discovery of a possible link between exposure to vinyl chloride manufactured and used at Calvert City and a rare form of liver cancer known as angiosarcoma.

The principle producer of vinyl chloride in this area is B.F. Goodrich Chemical Company who also supplies Air Products and Chemicals with the monomer for the production of polyvinyl chloride polymer. The possible link came

to light several months ago when it was learned that three men who had worked unwarranted fears among area workers. For that reason, educational meetings were held Tuesday at the IAM hall for workers involved in the production of vinyl chloride.

"We're not out to get any industry. Our purpose is to protect our people, whether through cutting down on exposure or advising them how to protect themselves, what precautions to take," he said.

Gray remarked the IAM has representatives in Washington keeping up with the OSHA hearings so the proper information can be funnelled down to the membership. "It is the unknown which concerns us," he said. "We don't try to take a ridiculous position that would cripple an industry but we want to protect our people," he added.

Gray concluded the only way an individual can be sure he will never get a disease from chemicals is to never be around chemicals. "That's impossible with vinyl chloride many years at BFG's Louisville facility had died of the cancer. Two more deaths were discovered later. In addition, two other victims of the same disease are still living.

The discovery has touched off a far-reaching scare and brought about the setting of an emergency vinyl chloride limit of 50 parts per million (ppm) by the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). The previous limit was 500 ppm.

OSHA is currently holding hearings in Washington which are expected to continue through this week and possibly longer. The agency is seeking a zero level of vinyl chloride in the air.

Area representatives from labor and

industry are taking part in the hearings.

While there is great concern for the health and safety of workers here, there is also concern over what the final ramification will be for the industry.

As one worker put it "the facts just aren't in yet. Nobody wants to get cancer but we don't want to destroy our jobs either."

Charles Woods, plant manager of BFG at Calvert, stated that company investigation, which has been extensive, has shown no harm has come to any employ at Calvert City as a result of exposure to vinyl chloride.

"Ongoing studies show no indications of any other disease related to vinyl chloride," Woods continued.

Woods feels many employees believe company precautions are adequate. He noted the cracking unit of the vinyl chloride plant is an open air operation.

Allan McMillan, cooperate production manager at Air Products, finds no unusual worry over the vinyl chloride scare among employees. "They know we are on top of the thing," he said.

J.R. Gray, International Association of Machinists Local 1294 representative, feels the recent publicity may implant today," he said.

Dr. J. Bradford Block MD, medical consultant to the Kentucky Department of Labor, present at Tuesday's meeting, found no evidence of panic among workers here. He did find concern about how the disease (cancer of the liver) is contracted and what precaution can be taken.

"Most of the men accept the fact that there is a certain amount of risk connected with any job," he said.

Dr. Block noted the debate centers on what is a safe level of vinyl chloride. He also remarked it has not been resolved whether cancer is developed due to low level exposure over a long period or a high level exposure once.

Speaking of the safe level he noted, "I think they will strike a compromise of something like 15 ppm which will allow manufacturers to continue to operate.

He commented that over one million people in the United States are involved in the production of vinyl chloride. Thirteen thousand of those are in Kentucky. This is the type of industry small communities have wanted because it was thought to be clean.

Dr. Block listed as precautionary measures for workers the use of respirators, protective clothing, showering immediately after work, changing of clothing, no eating or smcking in the area, and general common sense precautions.

He found the general attitude and overall morale to be good.



TO: R.B. Downey

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