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Taking Giant Steps

Two chemical process companies took giant steps toward diversifying into the oceanography field last week, and two paper companies with combined sales of nearly $1 billion/year reached a tentative agreement to merge.

(1) Bendix Corp. (Detroit) expanded its oceanic activities by acquiring for an undisclosed amount of stock Marine Advisers (La Jolla, Calif.), producer of oceanographic instruments for petroleum and utility companies, state and federal agencies and firms engaged in scientific programs.

(2) Fluor Corp. (Los Angeles) and B. L. McFarland and Associates (Fort Worth and Midland, Tex.), a group of five companies involved in offshore and onshore drilling operations, have agreed to merge, subject to stockholders' approval. The McFarland group operates five offshore drilling rigs in the Gulf of Mexico.

(3) A tentative agreement to merge has been reached by U.S. Plywood Corp. (New York) and Champion Papers, Inc. (Hamilton, O.). It is subject to both directors' and stockholders' approval. The corporate identities of both companies will be preserved.

Reducing Gas Rates

The Federal Power Commission has ordered El Paso Natural Gas Co. and Transwestern Pipeline Co. to reduce by $17 million/year the price of natural gas in the southern California market.

The rate cut stems from the July 26 decision in which FPC turned down the application of Gulf Pacific Pipeline Co. (a Tenneco subsidiary) to supply gas to the Los Angeles area (*CW. Aug. 6, p. 20*). Gulf Pacific last week filed for a rehearing.

El Paso and Transwestern were told they would have to lower their rates to reflect the lower costs resulting from the bigger deliveries possible in the expanded system. At the same time, FPC said it would conduct further proceedings to decide if customers should get additional benefits resulting from more liberal depreciation allowances.

FPC has given the companies 45 days to show cause why the reduction should not take place.

Sources of airborne asbestos

Asbestos-lined ducts used in centrally air-conditioned building
Asbestos ducts and insulation in home central-heating plants.
Motor vehicle brake linings and clutch plates.
Auto undercoatings.
Asbestos ceiling and floor tiles.
Asbestos shingles and sidings.
Construction and demolition
Fitting, cutting, and removing asbestos-filled wallboards a floorings, piping and insulation.
Incineration of asbestos-filled scrap.
Improperly filtered effluent from asbestos processing plants.

Asbestos: Awaiting 'Trial'

The asbestos industry—whose end products are valued at more than $500 million/year—may be in for a shakeup. It could come in the form of federal legislation limiting the use of asbestos, because asbestos has been accused—though not yet "convicted"—as a significant health hazard. Probable contender for asbestos markets: plastics.

Recent studies have convinced U.S. Public Health Service specialists and other medical authorities that about 40% of all Americans have mild, chronic cases of asbestosis, even though most of them never worked directly with asbestos.

Unlike other airborne dust particles, asbestos fibers have the ability—almost as much as activated carbon—to absorb polycyclic hydrocarbons and arsenicals. Furthermore, says USPHS, in the past 30 years the asbestos-related cancer rate has increased sixfold.

The Inferences: While the average asbestos worker is well protected, the man on the street is not. The 3x1-micron asbestos fibers in his lungs can come from a variety of sources (*table, above*).

And medical experts say there's no [illegible] hydrocarbon content in those lung deposits.

American Cancer Society researchers feel certain there is a synergistic relationship among airborne asbestos, smoking and lung cancer. They reason that the nondegradable, hydrocarbon-soaked fibers may well be a constant source of lung irritation.

PHS officials think it may them up to five years to est asbestos' true role as an air poll However, Congress may act b the research is finished. Says R sentative Robert Watkins (R- "We've seen enough evidence ready. Asbestos will never get a bill of health. With just a little data we'll move for controls strict ones."

Some form of asbestos contr in the offing, public health off are certain, if only part of a l clean-ambient-air program. How there is the danger that Congress enact rigorous controls on the qu ty of asbestos that could be usec

In that case both Canada and asbestos products manufact would be hard hit. Of the five l of asbestos mined today, chry asbestos holds the predominant ket position because of its ins ing and processing qualities. Ca produces more than 30% of the c sotile asbestos used in the U.S both countries, a number of sc dislocations would occur.

At present, there is no known terial that could fill all of asbe strategic roles. On the other h should federal controls merely for higher standards for binders shieldings, that would spark a ris new products, with plastics tal the lead.

Reason, say industry spokesm present polymer technology c easily turn up products to replace bestos in most end-uses.