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COSMETIC COMPLAINTS

by Nancy L. Ross

The cosmetics industry yesterday told a Senate health subcommittee it had an excellent safety record -- only 9,700 injuries last year -- and no additional regulation, especially pre-marketing clearance by the Food and Drug Administration, was necessary. Testimony came on the second and final day of hearings to revise cosmetics laws.

Under questioning by Senator Thomas Eagleton (D-Mo.), J. Richard Edmonson, chairman of the Cosmetics, Toiletry and Fragrance Association, did concede, however, that industry could live with mandatory registration of manufacturers, filling of formulas with the FDA and reporting of verified complaints.

Industry representatives balked when the senator asked them to respond to a subcommittee questionnaire detailing the total number of complaints they received annually, brand names of the offending products, the total value of their advertising budgets compared to their safety testing budgets and how much they had paid out in damage suits. Companies seemed willing to comply only on the condition the information not be made public.

Earlier, consumer advocate Ralph Nader had accused the industry of contradicting itself. He said: "On one hand, they tend to minimize adverse reactions from cosmetics and boast of how safe they are. But at the same time, they strongly oppose mandatory programs of adverse reaction reporting with public disclosure and don't want the government forcing them to prove their products safe."

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The Health Research Group, a Nader organization, yesterday asked the government to ban vinyl chloride, a propellant for aerosols, including inexpensive hairsprays. A derivative of vinyl chloride, polyvinyl chloride (PVC) has recently been linked to the deaths of five plastics workers in Kentucky. A sixth worker has also contracted the rare form of liver cancer.

Dr. Wolfe said he did not know how many personal and household products contained vinyl chloride because no ingredient labeling is legally required on cosmetics. He asked FDA Commissioner Alexander Schmidt to make the brand names public.

Dr. Wolfe maintains a manufacturer he declined to identify told him recently vinyl chloride was still being used in hairsprays. A spokesman for Dow Chemical, which makes vinyl chloride, said it had recommended in May 1973 that the propellant not be used for personal products. A spokesman for Aerosol Age magazine said vinyl chloride was no longer in wide use.

CTFA presented an Arthur D. Little Inc. study showing that review of the 25,000 cosmetics now on the market would take "all of the estimated 1,340 qualified experimental and veterinary pathologists now practicing in the U.S. half of their time for 30 years and would cost \$6.5 billion."

These figures were challenged by Dr. Sidney M. Wolfe of the Health Research Group, who said the cost would be much less due to duplication of cosmetics and because many marginal products would be eliminated at the very prospect of government scrutiny.

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The Health Research Group, meanwhile, petitioned CPSC, the Food and Drug Administration, and the Environmental Protection Agency to ban the use of vinyl chloride in aerosolized cosmetics, including hairsprays, in aerosolized household products, and in pesticides, on grounds "there is substantial evidence that vinyl chloride is a carcinogen."

The petitioner is a public interest group funded by Ralph Nader's Public Citizen group. The research group declared:

"Vinyl chloride is known to be used as a propellant for aerosols. The chronic toxicity and evidence of carcinogenicity of vinyl chloride monomer for humans has been documented by scientific studies and clinical reports. Immediate action is necessary to regulate the use of the chemical since there is no evidence to show that human beings can be safely exposed to the chemical.

"Vinyl chloride monomer, which is used in making polyvinyl chloride (PVC), has received much attention in the past few weeks since it has been linked with a rapidly rising number of liver cancer deaths among vinyl chloride workers at a single B. F. Goodrich plant in Louisville, Kentucky. In the past few days the sixth case of the rare and invariably fatal cancer--angiosarcoma of the liver--has been diagnosed in a worker at that plant.

"Experimental studies have found production of the same type of liver cancer in rats after inhalation of vinyl chloride at doses as low as 250 ppm [for 127 weeks], according to an Italian study presented at a Department of Labor hearing on the chemical last Friday.

"According to a published report, the levels of vinyl chloride--under conditions where hair spray is being used--can exceed 250 ppm (Aerosol Age, April 1964, p. 47). Most industries--including B. F. Goodrich--say that it has less their practice in recent years to try to keep industrial exposures down to 50 ppm over an 8 hour day. The federal occupational health standard is currently 500 ppm."

• The Health Research Group also requested that the Food and Drug Administration immediately prohibit the use of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) containers to package any cosmetic product which is capable of leaching detectable amounts of vinyl chloride from its plastic container.

In letters to the heads of all three agencies, the group requested that the agency make public the brand names of all aerosol consumer products and cosmetics presently marketed--or marketed at any time in the past--which contain vinyl chloride as a propellant so that "exposed people" can inform their physicians.