

The Society of the
Plastics Industry, Inc.

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Ralph L. Harding, Jr.
President

August 12, 1976

8/12/76

Mr. James G. Bellows
Editor
The Washington Star
225 Virginia Avenue, S. E.
Washington, D. C. 20061

Dear Mr. Bellows:

As President the The Society of the Plastics Industry, Inc., the principal trade association of the entire plastics industry, I share the Star's concern over pre-market screening of potentially dangerous chemical substances. Our industry has supported reasonable legislation to achieve this purpose, and we believe that H.R. 14032, the pending House legislation, is a marked improvement over the Senate-passed bill.

However, we must point out that your editorial of August 10, 1976 makes some unfortunate misstatements with regard to polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastic. There is no dispute about the existence of an occupational disease problem for industry workers who in the past were exposed to high concentrations of vinyl chloride gas (VCM) over extended periods of time. VCM is the gaseous industrial raw material from which polyvinyl chloride plastic is produced. Industry itself first detected the problem and tremendous strides have been made in the last two years in reducing worker exposure to VCM.

However, there is no evidence of any health risk to the general public from any finished PVC plastic product. Your reference to PVC meat wrap as an example of potential risk is wide of the mark because the Food and Drug Administration made a specific finding on September 5, 1975 that PVC film wrap is safe. Subsequently the plastics industry submitted more than 700 pages of data to FDA, demonstrating recent steps by industry to further reduce the VCM content of PVC plastics and thereby safeguard the public to an even greater degree.

Second, your editorial refers to keeping "subway riders from inhaling toxic fumes if the car they're in happens to catch fire." Despite popular misconceptions, PVC is hard to ignite and doesn't emit vinyl chloride when it is burned. The reason PVC is used to protect electrical wiring, for instance, is because it is both durable and more fire resistant than traditional insulating materials. Any organic product is capable of giving off toxic by-products in a fire, and PVC will do so, but the release of these materials takes place when the fire environment is already hostile to humans. Carbon Monoxide and lack of

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oxygen are still the primary threats to life in fire situations.

The plastics industry is deeply concerned that PVC and all other plastics be made as safe as possible, not only for the workers who make them, but for the general public. We appreciate the opportunity to reaffirm this concern and to set the record straight with regard to PVC.

Cordially,

Ralph L. Harding, Jr.
President

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