The Journal's
Page Of Opinion
Ohio's Golden Crescent

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The Journal, Lorain, Ohio Monday, January 26, 1976

JAN 27 RECD

Accuracy of Article on Polyvinyl Chloride Hazard Challenged

EDITOR'S NOTE: In an effort to attract a diversity of opinion on a variety of subjects, knock down the sacred cows, battle with the right and left and middle, dissent from majority views, The Journal is offering in this space articles from insiders and outsiders who may differ with The Journal. Free expression, we believe, is essential to democracy.

By JOHN L. NELSON
Division Vice President, Mfg.
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We note that The Lorain Journal reprinted in its January 4 issue the article in Rolling Stone, "The Plastic Coffin of Charlie Arthur." Because of the seriousness of this subject to the people in your circulation area, especially in Avon Lake, we believe your readers are entitled to know the facts in regard to several inaccuracies in this story.

ITEM: The story reports that Dr. Peter Infante, then of the Ohio Department of Health, had found that three Northern Ohio communities with polyvinyl chloride plants had higher than average birth defects.

FACT: Dr. Infante, in his report to the New York Academy of Science, stated that there is not sufficient evidence to link vinyl chloride to birth defects.

The Center for Disease Control of the U.S. Public Health Service, in its weekly Mortality and Morbidity report for July 19, 1975, reports its own study of this subject. The report states that the study "could not establish any relationship between cases (birth defects) and vinyl chloride exposure."

ITEM: The story quotes a worker, only identified as "Harry", who charged that a supervisor had "pulled the plug" on a Goodrich plant monitoring system, so that work could continue during periods of higher exposure. The story correctly states that the company denied these charges.

FACT: First, Goodrich PVC plants have two monitoring systems — a computerized area monitoring system, and personal monitoring systems. One backs up the other. OSHA requires that all records must be kept and made available to both federal inspectors and employes. It would have been very easy to verify Harry's allegation. A recent check of these records shows no gap.

ITEM: The story quotes "other workers" as saying that when government inspectors visited our Ohio PVC plant, the company shut down most of the vinyl chloride lines, claiming that maintenance work was being done on them.

FACT: Under the OSHA inspection system, inspectors visit plants without prior notice, and therefore could arrive when maintenance operations are occurring. Since it takes some time to shut down and restart PVC reactions, this rumor is not only untrue, it just doesn't make sense.

ITEM: The Rolling Stone story quotes a Wall Street Journal story of October 29, 1975 which reported that nine PVC workers at the Shawinigan plant of BFG Canada had died from angiosarcoma, "but the company had chosen not to make an official announcement."

FACT: The Wall Street Journal story, which itself resulted from a company announcement, states: "Goodrich Canada announced in a news release last December that four cases of liver angiosarcoma had been uncovered from death records of former Shawinigan workers. . . The U.S. parent company said in its annual report last spring that the Shawinigan angiosarcoma toll had climbed to eight deaths."

Only one of these men ever worked at the Shawinigan plant after it was purchased by Goodrich Canada. None of the rest were Goodrich workers, although the article said they were.

The Wall Street Journal also reported, correctly, that we had reported all these cases to the U.S. National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health. The cases also were reported to Quebec authorities and to all PVC employes in Canada. The Shawinigan release was carried in the U.S. by the Associated Press.

Since Joe Klein, the author, apparently had The Wall Street Journal story, we cannot understand his allegation that the company "chose not to make an official announcement."

***Just as important as these* individual inaccuracies, however, is the overall impression created by the Rolling Stone article. The article clearly implies that B.F. Goodrich executives, managers and foremen conspired to suppress information relating to employes' health and to prevent implementation of safeguards to resolve this most serious situation. This implication is unfounded.**

Omitted from Klein's story are such facts as: Goodrich freely and voluntarily publicized its findings, of the first angiosarcoma cases when they were discovered. The company supplied detailed information to employes, state and federal officials and the industry. Goodrich has conducted the largest research program in its history, and is spending an estimated $42,000,000 to prevent exposure to vinyl chloride in plants, in the environment and in products. The company has stated that it can operate within all present and expected regulations.

KLEIN SAT in the front row at the press briefing where all these programs were explained in detail, and all questions fully answered, and he was given all supporting material to substantiate the open manner in which Goodrich has handled the entire matter. The fact that he did not choose to use any of this positive information is a clear indication of his lack of objectivity.

The Lorain Journal, however, did print most of these facts in its issue of December 5. We hope that your readers, recalling the previous story, will be able to take a more balanced view than that presented by Rolling Stone.

Another Viewpoint

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