



Environmental News

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EPA TO SET VINYL CHLORIDE EMISSIONS STANDARD

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Russell E. Train announced today that the Agency will establish an air pollution emission standard for vinyl chloride. Development of an air standard was one of nineteen recommendations submitted to the Administrator last week by EPA's vinyl chloride task force.

The air standard would apply to emissions from the nation's 15 vinyl chloride monomer and the 37 polyvinyl chloride resin manufacturing plants. The Agency is still investigating the possible need for a standard applicable to the roughly 8,000 polyvinyl chloride fabricating facilities. (The monomer and resin manufacturing plants account for more than 95 percent of vinyl chloride emissions.)

Train formed the task force last February when it was learned that several workers at vinyl chloride production plants had died from angiosarcoma of the liver, a rare but fatal form of cancer, and that there was an estimated material loss of vinyl chloride and polyvinyl chloride, of six percent during the polymerization process. Vinyl chloride, a

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gaseous chemical, has been strongly implicated as a cause of this form of cancer and may increase the risk from other cancers as well.

In accepting the task force recommendations, Train said that EPA would immediately begin "the additional analysis and monitoring necessary for establishing appropriate emission controls."

Train said the process of setting an air emission standard under the Clean Air Act would probably require several months of monitoring and other investigations, data collection, public hearings and other required regulatory steps as required by the Act. He also said an environmental impact statement would be prepared, and public hearings held, to "insure full public participation in the development of this standard."

"I intend to expedite these procedures as much as possible," Train said, "but it's extremely important that our standards and decisions be based on the best scientific data available in order to ensure that the health of our citizens is protected."

The Task Force report released today estimates that "substantial amounts of vinyl chloride -- probably exceeding 200 million pounds annually -- and large quantities of polyvinyl chloride--probably exceeding 50 million pounds -- are being discharged into the environment during the polyvinyl chloride polymerization process. Most of the vinyl chloride escapes directly into the atmosphere, with lesser amounts dissolved in water effluent streams and entrapped in sludge and solid wastes."

Initial estimates indicate that emissions could be reduced by about 75 percent from polyvinyl chloride resin plants and 90 percent from vinyl chloride plants with a concomitant cumulative increase in the cost of polyvinyl chloride of about four percent. It is estimated that the available control technology, which includes a variety of control measures applicable to the multiple emission points within the plants, could be in place from within several months to two years after promulgation of appropriate regulations.

In addition to the air standard, eighteen recommendations for EPA action have been made by the task force, including:

--Additional ambient air monitoring at selected sites to support regulatory action under the Clean Air Act;

--More detailed material balance studies, in cooperation with industry, to more clearly identify leakage points in the manufacturing process;

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--Monitoring of drinking water supplies which could be contaminated from vinyl chloride discharges from nearby polyvinyl chloride plants;

--Studies around industrial storage and disposal sites and municipal disposal sites to determine the types and quantities of toxic substances leached or discharged out of (a) semi-solid wastes generated by vinyl chloride/polyvinyl chloride facilities or (b) polyvinyl chloride products discarded by consumers.

Recommendations for action by industry encourage all possible steps to (a) tighten up operating and maintenance procedures to reduce emissions from vinyl chloride and polyvinyl chloride facilities and (b) expand research, testing and monitoring activities to improve the base for assessing the risks associated with vinyl chloride.

The task force report also emphasizes a need for the Toxic Substances Control Act. The proposed legislation, under which EPA would set requirements for industry to make pre-market tests of possible dangerous new chemical products, is now before Congress.

The report points out that "many of the considerations and uncertainties that have punctuated the vinyl chloride/polyvinyl chloride deliberations undoubtedly characterize a far broader swath of concerns over high volume industrial chemicals in general, and plastics in particular." The task force report adds that the Toxic Substances Control Act "would provide a mechanism for addressing those products using vinyl chloride not now subject to regulation under other laws."

To date, 25 cases of liver angiosarcoma have been identified worldwide in workers exposed to vinyl chloride. In most, but not all of these cases, the workers had been repeatedly exposed to high levels of the gas over a substantial number of years. It has also been suggested that vinyl chloride may be implicated in several non-worker deaths from this liver cancer. Whether vinyl chloride is the cause of these deaths is still being investigated.

The Occupational Health and Safety Administration is currently considering vinyl chloride standards to protect workers inside the plants.

The task force report is available from EPA, Room 335W, 401 M Street, SW., Washington, D.C. 20460.

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