

TO: Industrial Relations Managers
FROM: R. M. Montgomery

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Goodrich Unit's PVC Facility in Quebec Has Had 9 Deaths Due to a Rare Cancer

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A Canadian plastics plant, with nine deaths so far, has gained the grim distinction of having more known fatal cases of a rare liver cancer caused by occupational exposure to vinyl chloride gas than any other single plant in the world.

A spokesman for B.F. Goodrich Chemical Co. in Cleveland confirmed that nine deaths due to angiosarcoma of the liver had occurred over past years among former workers at the B.F. Goodrich Canada Ltd. polyvinyl chloride plant in Shawinigan, Quebec. Both are units of B.F. Goodrich Co., Akron.

Angiosarcoma was first linked early last year to long-term exposure to vinyl chloride gas, which is used to make polyvinyl chloride plastic, or PVC. Including the Canadian cases, 45 workers around the world exposed to vinyl chloride in PVC plants have developed liver angiosarcoma. Almost all are dead. Seven other cases of angiosarcoma also have been linked to exposure to the chemical.

The first cases of vinyl-chloride-linked angiosarcoma were discovered in January 1974 at the B.F. Goodrich PVC plant at Louisville, Ky. That plant currently has recorded eight angiosarcoma deaths, with a ninth case still living.

Three cases have been uncovered at the Union Carbide Corp. plant at South Charleston, W.Va., and another three at the Goodrich Tire & Rubber Co. in Niagara Falls, N.Y. One case each has occurred at a Goodrich plant in Avon Lake, Ohio, and at a Firestone Tire & Rubber Co. plant in Pottstown, Pa., according to records kept by the government's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health in Cincinnati.

Abroad, five cases have been reported from PVC plants in West Germany, three from France, two each from Czechoslovakia, Britain, Italy and Yugoslavia, and one each in Norway, Sweden and Japan. Other cases of occupational exposure to vinyl chloride that resulted in liver angiosarcoma include two each in the U.S. and Canada, and one each in Britain, Italy and Sweden.

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, with the earliest occurring in 1968. Goodrich purchased the plant from Gulf Canada Ltd. in 1972, and the company noted in the December release that only one of the deaths had occurred while Goodrich owned the plant.

The plant, formerly known as Shawinigan Chemical Ltd., employs about 200 workers. The U.S. parent company said in its annual report issued last spring that the Shawinigan angiosarcoma toll had climbed to eight deaths. And it recently reported to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health that the total had reached 10 deaths.

But a company spokesman said yesterday that one of the deaths on further examination had turned out not to be angiosarcoma.

All of the angiosarcoma deaths were discovered by Dr. Fernand Delorme, a pathologist at the Maurice Central Regional Hospital at Shawinigan Sud. Both Shawinigan and Shawinigan Sud are about 80 miles northeast of Montreal, about midway between Montreal and Quebec city.

The Shawinigan plant was built in 1941 and is, like the Goodrich plant in Louisville, one of the oldest PVC plants in the world.

Goodrich said that after the first cases of angiosarcoma were uncovered at Louisville it "greatly accelerated" a plant modernization program at Shawinigan and that worker exposure to vinyl chloride gas has been drastically reduced.

The company said the province of Quebec hasn't set occupational standards for vinyl chloride exposure, but the company adheres to standards set by the province of Ontario. (Occupational safety is a provincial matter in Canada, unlike the U.S. where the federal government sets standards.)

In the U.S., federal standards require PVC plants to prevent worker exposure to levels of vinyl chloride of more than one part per million parts of the air they breathe. The Ontario standards allow a maximum exposure of 10 parts per million averaged over eight hours, although Goodrich said exposure levels at the Shawinigan plant were currently averaging between two and three parts per million.

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