U.S. Unit Defends Vinyl Chloride Curbs, Saying They Aren't Too Hard on Firms

By a WALL STREET JOURNAL *Staff Reporter*

WASHINGTON — A Labor Department report disputed the plastics industry's claim that a proposed government standard for restricting handling of vinyl chloride would force numerous plastics plants to close.

The industry has contended that the proposed ruling, which would bar exposing workers to any "detectable" amount of the chemical, can't feasibly be met, and the industry warns that adoption of the ruling would close down the large part of the plastics industry that uses vinyl chloride and its derivatives as raw materials.

But the government report says flatly that evidence to date doesn't indicate "that promulgation of the proposed standard will stop vinyl chloride production and use."

The report, a draft version of an environmental impact study on the proposed strict vinyl chloride standard, was made public yesterday at the start of a week of hearings on the standard. The hearings are expected to be dominated by plastics-industry spokesmen questioning the scientific research on vinyl chloride and warning of economic disruption if the standard is issued.

Vinyl chloride, a gas, is thought to be responsible for 21 world-wide cases of a rare and fatal liver cancer, angiosarcoma. Tens of thousands of U.S. workers are directly and indirectly exposed to the chemical daily because it is the base product from which companies make polyvinyl chloride, a powdery substance used to form a multitude of everyday plastic products.

In April, the Labor Department cut workers' allowable exposure to vinyl chloride to 50 parts per million in the air they breathe. The proposed rule being debated at the hearings would slash that further, barring any "detectable exposure."

The study concedes that "production in some plants could be curtailed if reengineering is required," and it predicts "marginal" companies may need federal loans to help pay for improvements. But it says equipment needed to meet the standard doesn't necessarily need to be elaborate, and much progress can be made by improving "poor housekeeping and inadequate maintenance." It concludes that "the technology appears to be readily available," and thus "substantial development costs" won't be needed.

The contradictory industry position, which warns of economic chaos, was attacked at the hearings by the AFL-CIO as "blackmail." Peter Bommarito, president of the United Rubber Workers union, said, "This country survived for nearly two hundred years without polyvinyl chloride and we can survive in the future without it." But he also disputed industry contentions that the standard would end polyvinyl chloride output, saying older plants can be altered, and in new plants the task of meeting the standard is a problem "characterized by the will, not the ability, to do the job."

Mr. Bommarito also accused the industry of trying to whip up a "hysterical" public relations campaign predicting the demise of the industry, and he said the AFL-CIO will call for a congressional investigation of the industry's public relations effort.

The industry also proposed its own standards for handling vinyl chloride. Instead of barring any "detectable exposure," it urged gradually decreasing exposure ceilings, starting with 40 parts per million this year in polyvinyl chloride plants to be decreased to 25 parts in late 1976.

In plants handling raw vinyl chloride, the industry plan calls for a 25-parts-per-million ceiling this year, decreasing to 10 parts per million by 1977. In both kinds of plants, actual average exposure over an eight-hour day would be less than the full ceiling, due to differing emissions of the chemical at different times of day.

There also was evidence at the hearings, however, that even average exposures below a 10-parts-per-million level can cause disease. Dr. Irving Sellkoff, noted occupational health researcher, reported he has found noncancerous liver diseases among workers at a Dow Chemical Co. plant in Michigan where levels of average exposure last year were generally below 10 parts. He cautioned, however, that it wasn't known whether the diseases were contracted before or after exposure was dramatically lowered by Dow in the early 1960s.

Mapco Sees Net Rising In 2nd, 3rd Quarters

By a WALL STREET JOURNAL *Staff Reporter*

CHICAGO—Robert E. Thomas, chairman of Mapco Inc., estimated sharply increased earnings for the second and third quarters compared with a year before.

Speaking to the oil group of the Investment Analysts Society of Chicago, he said Mapco should earn \$6.3 million to \$6.5 million for the second quarter, compared with \$3.1 million a year before. Per-share net should be 34 cents to 36 cents, compared with 17 cents, he added.

Revenue should rise to \$54 million to \$55 million, compared with \$33.8 million a year before, he said.

Third quarter earnings should be about the same as those predicted for the second quarter, he said. In 1973's third quarter, the company earned \$2.2 million, or 12 cents a share.

The improved results for the historically low second and third quarters are largely a result of increasing oil and coal production. "This increased output is new evidence of Mapco's emergence as a total energy company which is no longer dependent on seasonal demand for some of its products," he said.

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