

2 chemicals suspected as cause of rare form of fatal cancer

By John Nussbaum

Vinyl chloride and polyvinyl chloride, synthetic chemicals used in a variety of manufacturing processes, are suspected culprits in three fatal cases of a rare form of cancer.

The chemicals are the subject of intense investigations by the B. F. Goodrich Co., the United Rubber Workers and the International Chemical Workers Unions, National Institute of Occupational Safety and

Health (NIOSH) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

The investigations began when Goodrich on Jan. 22 reported it was examining all employees involved in producing and handling the chemicals to determine whether three deaths from hemangiosarcoma (cancer of the blood vessels) of the liver were job-related.

The deaths occurred in December 1973, March 1973 and September 1973 in Goodrich's plant in Louisville, Ky. The URW says another 1968 cancer death may stem from the same cause.

The reason the cases in

one plant drew attention is that only about 21 cases a year are reported in the United States, according to the chemical union. The union has asked its 90,000 members in the United States and Canada to furnish data they may have about the use and effects of the chemicals.

Investigation of the chemicals, and possible regulatory government action, will be coordinated at a meeting Tuesday in the Sheraton Hopkins International Airport.

The conference will include Dr. Irving Selikoff, a New York occupational health expert; Peter Bom-

marito, president of the URW and chairman of the health and welfare division of the AFL-CIO industrial union, and representatives of the unions, government health agencies and the public health schools of Harvard University and the University of North Carolina. The two universities conduct the URW's occupational health program.

The unions and Goodrich had met with Dr. Selikoff's staff at New York's Mount Sinai Hospital Jan. 30 and in Washington last week, according to a URW spokesman. Another meeting is scheduled Friday in Washington. The U. S. Labor Department may be asked to set emergency standards for the chemicals during the investigation.

The government recently issued standards for 14 chemicals discovered to cause cancer, but vinyl chloride and polivinyl chlorides were not included.

Dr. Selikoff figured prominently in research leading to the identification of the 14 chemicals. He also was instrumental in the identification in recent years of asbestosis, a lung disease, as an occupational disease of asbestos workers.

Louis Beliczky, the chemical workers union's director of industrial hygiene, said chemical-related can-

cer "usually has a latency of up to 20 years." Since the use of vinyl is relatively recent, he said it is possible the cases of liver cancer discovered so far may be the first of several more.

If the chemicals are found to be the cause, safeguards could be established to protect potential victims.

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Washington outlook

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A Jackson backlash in the Senate

Senator Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.) is beginning to lose friends and irritate people—and not just his rivals for the 1976 Democratic Presidential nomination—by his steamroller tactics on the energy issue.

Jackson, chairman of the Senate Interior Committee, was way out in front of most lawmakers in seeing the fuel crisis coming. Now, he is widely accepted by the press, and thus the public, as "Mr. Energy" in the Senate.

But other Presidential hopefuls—such as Senator Walter Mondale (D-Minn.), who originated the idea of a rollback of crude oil prices—don't like to see Jackson get all the credit. And other committee chairmen resent his poaching on their territory.

Jackson's plan for "a major energy tax reform package," with special hearings on it, rolls right over the turf of Senator Russell B. Long's (D-La.) Finance Committee. The ceiling on crude oil prices being written into the energy emergency bill tramples the jurisdiction of Senator John J. Sparkman's (D-Ala.) Banking Committee. Softening Clean Air Act standards muscles in on environmental legislation, long the bailiwick of Senators Edmund Muskie (D-Me.) and Gaylord Nelson (D-Wis.)

Resentments played some part in last week's 57-37 vote to send the far-reaching energy emergency bill back to conference—a major Jackson defeat. And the Democratic Caucus, on Mondale's urging, is about to create a new coordinating committee on energy legislation, including the chairmen of all committees involved, so that they will have a say.

But Jackson will be tough to cut down. He has a top-flight staff and does his homework. And even though he put oil industry executives through the grinder last month, there are no signs yet that he has lost the business support that has sustained his Senate campaigns and is vital to a 1976 bid.

Environmental enemy No. 1

Environmental lobbyists have a new top priority: blocking President Nixon's proposal for speeding up site approval for new energy facilities.

Nixon's bill, still being circulated within the Administration, would require each state to "meet its share of the regional and national needs" for energy production. If states dragged their feet, the federal government could intervene, choose a site, and give the go-ahead for anything from a deep-water port to a nuclear power plant (page 57).

Environmentalists fear that the bill would doom

their efforts to rein in such projects as massive coal-burning power plants in Western states where the air is now clean. They hope state and local government lobbyists will help them kill it.

New industrial cancer hazard?

Occupational Safety & Health officials are in the throes of a new cancer scare—this time related to vinyl chloride. Four cases of liver cancer have been diagnosed among longtime workers at a B. F. Goodrich plant in Louisville. These are prompting fears of further cases among workers in 42 other U. S. plants that manufacture or process the chemical, which is used in plastics.

The National Institute of Occupational Safety & Health already has issued a first set of safety recommendations for handling vinyl chloride—never associated with cancer before. But at a hurry-up meeting Monday in Cleveland, federal officials will meet with union and industry representatives to discuss how to implement the safety procedures and whether more steps may be needed.

Some officials fear the problem is widespread. "It's a big story, and it's going to get bigger," says William Lloyd, chief of Health Surveillance and Biostatistics for NIOSH. "We want to determine the extent of the problem as quickly as we can."

Capital wrapup

Compromised mediator: President Nixon's naming of Federal Mediation & Conciliation Service Director William J. Usery, Jr., as chief troubleshooter on energy labor problems worries agency professionals. It makes Usery an Administration spokesman, a role traditionally shunned by government mediators. FMCS officials fear it may hamper his—and their—effectiveness at the bargaining table.

Mustering out: The Senate Armed Services Committee will tackle the new Defense budget (page 67) without two of its key staff veterans. Director of Investigations Ben J. Gilleas, who since 1953 has headed probes of troubled weapons systems, is setting up a management consulting firm. And General Counsel R. James Woolsey is joining a Washington law firm.

Campfires: The Army may soon switch to a new source of power at two of its U. S. bases: wood. Technical consultants say timberlands within the boundaries of Fort Benning, Ga., and Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., contain enough timber to fuel the 10-Mw. power plants at each installation indefinitely.

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