

Newspaper cutting from Dagens Nyheter of November 12th 1967.

Is plastic also a cancer risk?

Eight workers at Stigens Fabriker outside Gothenburg have had cancer since 1962. This is an alarmingly high figure - especially at a company with only a couple of hundred employees. These eight men have all been working very long with this company and their ages were between 40 and 65 years. The Industrial Welfare Safety Board is now going to investigate whether there are any connections between these accidents and the working milieu.

At Stigens Fabriker there is no asbestos but they have several chemicals with codes or with foreign descriptions, mostly unknown to the workers. These eight men are not connected to each other in their work fields neither did they die of the same sort of cancer.

The investigation will be rather complicated. There are various kinds of cancer involved such as leukemia, lungcancer and kidney cancer. A special product is referred to ^{but} some of the workers had been working with plastics. Especially in the case of 2 men who had leukemia.

Mr B Bucht at The Industrial Welfare Safety Board says that it is known that a special type of cancer in the liver can be caused by vinyl chloride. If this is the case at Stigens one does not know for sure, as there are only reports from relatives at hand and not any medical evidence. As to dyeing it is not known that ready-made colours could be causing cancer. However some basic ingredients are suspected to cause cancer.

Around 2000 people in Sweden are working with armed plastic - mostly in the yachting industry and especially with Styrene.

Styrene is a solution easily set on fire and it is used when producing plastic. The smell is very strong and it also irritates the eyes as well as the respiratory organs. Styrene is also drying out the skin and irritates. Styrene comes into the blood stream through the skin or when inhaling. So far one has thought the most dangerous with Styrene was that it influences the brain and nerve system. A Swedish investigation shows that someone working with Styrene gets slower reactions than normally. This is when 200-300 ppm are found at the working area. Some countries have lower limit values. USA and West-Germany for instance have 100 ppm but Sweden and many others have 50 ppm as the limit. Soviet has 1.2.

But especially within the yachting industry these limits are exceeded.

There is no real proof so far that Styrene is causing cancer but the suspicion is enough to start a big investigation. It will be a difficult task as the Styrene is turned into Styrene-epoxy inside the body. One has not yet been able to follow this procedure but it is known that epoxy causes cancer. The Styrene epoxy goes into the urine and when it has left the organism it is no longer the dangerous epoxy. There are no proved cases of Styrene causing cancer. But it can take up to 10-20 years before realising it. As to asbestos the case is clear and there is no point in waiting too long for Styrene.

English scientists showed in the 1950 that it is possible that Styrene epoxy causes cancer. Russian scientists showed last year that female rats, which had been given small doses of Styrene, got their foetus poisoned. In Sweden last year an investigation proved that germs exposed to Styrene got chromosome damages. The fear is now that Styrene can cause genetic damages.

The problem is now to tie all loose ends together to get proof - for or against Styrene. The question is - are the limit values too high?