



Health Hazards

FUROR, INVESTIGATION FOLLOW THREE DEATHS FROM CANCER AT KENTUCKY PLANT

An investigation of the possibility that the cancer deaths of three workers at a plant in Louisville, Ky., were job-related was announced by the B.F. Goodrich Company.

At the company's request, an investigation of the plant was initiated by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health on January 24. A seven-man team, including two industrial hygienists, from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, was sent to the plant.

It is suspected that the deaths are linked to polyvinyl chloride production. If the link is established, the implications for the plastics industry could be enormous. Thousands of workers are employed in operations involving the production of about five billion pounds of polyvinyl chloride each year. The substance is used in an array of plastic products.

B.F. Goodrich reported that the three workers died of angiosarcoma of the liver, a rare form of liver cancer. NIOSH reports the annual death rate from angiosarcoma in the U.S. is 21. One NIOSH source also voiced the suspicion that many other worker deaths attributed to cirrhosis of the liver could have been due to angiosarcoma.

B.F. Goodrich Report

According to the company's report, a review of medical records uncovered three worker deaths from angiosarcoma. A fourth death in 1968 involving a more common form of liver cancer was said to be outside the reasonable bounds of the "grouping" of the three more recent deaths from angiosarcoma.

According to Dr. Maurice N. Johnson, B.F. Goodrich director of environmental health, the workers who died were all involved in the firm's vinyl products operations. The workers had an average of 20 years exposure to various chemicals and agents involved in the vinyl operations.

Goodrich said it was conducting a program to reduce exposure to hydrocarbons, particularly vinyl chloride, throughout its operations. Further steps to limit exposure and to explain the situation to Goodrich workers are being taken.

Goodrich also said it is providing medical examinations to all employees involved in any phase of vinyl chloride or polyvinyl chloride production, and is reviewing all of its medical records of former or retired employees.

Goodrich has four other polyvinyl chloride plants at Avon Lake, Ohio, Pedricktown, N.J., Long Beach, Calif., and Henry, Ill.

NIOSH Investigation

NIOSH plans to investigate the Louisville plant and then review other plants with polyvinyl chloride operations. It is estimated that about 5,000 workers are

involved in the business of stringing together polyvinyl chloride molecules.

NIOSH Director Dr. Marcus Key said NIOSH would begin development of a work practices criteria document for vinyl chloride for transfer to OSHA to act as the basis for a health standard.

OSHA Action

OSHA sent two investigators to the B.F. Goodrich plant in Louisville to determine if there were violations of federal job safety and health standards or worker exposure to vinyl chloride. Under federal standards, workers may not at any time be exposed to vinyl chloride in concentrations greater than 500 parts per million parts of air.

OSHA will hold a public hearing on the vinyl chloride crisis in Conference Room B, Departmental Auditorium, Constitution Avenue between 12th and 14th Sts., NW, Washington, D.C., on February 15. Comments and requests to appear should be filed by that date addressed to OSHA, Room 203, MOWA, Department of Labor, Washington, D.C. 20210.

Rubber Workers Response

Peter Bommarito, United Rubber Workers president, said a specific causative agent of the deaths as yet has not been identified, but could be related to vinyl chloride or chemicals used in the polymerization of the polyvinyl chloride resin. Although none of the B.F. Goodrich plants producing the material are organized by the URW, AFL-CIO, many other plants involved with polyvinyl chloride production do employ members of the URW.

"Although this could directly affect our membership, the impact of this information could be worldwide," Bommarito said. Representatives of the Rubber Workers will meet with B.F. Goodrich and NIOSH officials for a briefing on the problem.

As chairman of the Industrial Union Department health and safety committee, Bommarito will set up a conference with other international union presidents whose membership could also be involved. A study approach and policy for worker protection and monitoring will be considered.

The University of North Carolina has already initiated a crash epidemiological study of the Rubber Workers local involved with polyvinyl chloride production, Bommarito said, as covered by the joint negotiated job health program. A more comprehensive investigation will be designed in the near future, he said.

Carcinogens

OSHA ISSUES 14 SEPARATE CARCINOGENS STANDARDS; REJECTS USE PERMIT SYSTEM

Permanent standards for 14 carcinogens were adopted by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration on January 29.