zene or the benzene - based materials from the free marketplace, utilizing them internally or bartering them away for items that may be [otherwise] unavailable. . . .

"The regulations as written provide the oil companies with relief in securing their feedstocks," Mr. Fass continues. "The theory goes that if these feedstocks are secured, then they will take care of the downstream market." But to Mr. Fass, the situation "is somewhat akin to the lamb in the lion's den." □

Goodrich's warning could save lives

MEDICAL EXPERTS at the National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health (NIOSH) are running computer checks of medical records and autopsy reports from a number of vinyl chloride plants across the U. S.

Spurring the investigations was a report in January that since 1971 three employees of B. F. Goodrich Co.'s polyvinyl chloride plant in Louisville have died of angiosarcoma of the liver.

Angiosarcoma, Goodrich doctors explain, is a fairly rare form of cancer. And a determination that the Goodrich illnesses were indeed caused by the work environment would no doubt lead to a revision of federal standards for working with vinyl chlorides.

Who told?—Although the last employee died in December, Goodrich did not receive an autopsy report until mid-January. And although all five of the firm's vinyl chloride plants were operating well below levels prescribed by the government—the Louisville plant at only 10% of those levels, Dr. Maurice N. Johnson, Goodrich's director of environmental health, said awareness that this was the third death of its kind "warranted a thorough investigation. . . ."

Goodrich, under the law, was duty-bound to notify Kentucky health officials. But the firm was not required to notify NIOSH or to release notice of the deaths to the press.

And the fact that they did is somewhat unusual. NIOSH information officer Dick Wilson says the voluntary report was "unique.

"In our experience—and this dates back to June 1971, when the institute was first set up—this is the first voluntary alert we've received."

Because the petrochemical industry has been with us for about 20 years—and the three who died worked around vinyl chloride an average of 20 years—Mr. Wilson is concerned that the industry might soon see more such cases.

The Goodrich report "gives us a head start on finding if there is work-relatedness in these deaths, and in finding suitable standards if there is."

Operation candor—"We were required by law to notify Kentucky officials," says John Bell, Goodrich's director of external communications and public affairs. "But those reports are privileged. Not a matter of public record.

"So our decision to notify NIOSH and to make a public announcement was based not on legal considerations but on practical matters.

"The evidence was complex, fragmentary, and inconclusive. Nonetheless, we wanted to tell our employees what is going on and not make them rely on hearing everything second-hand, or getting fragmentary information from unreliable sources," he says. □

HMO: a health care option your firm will have to offer

BUSINESSMEN may soon find HMOs are an old idea whose time has come.

Starting next year, many employers will have to offer their workers the option of health maintenance organization (HMO) enrollment instead of traditional health insurance.

The reason: a little-noticed section of the Health Maintenance Organization Act that President Nixon signed Dec. 29.

The legislation applies to firms covered by the minimum wage law and which have an average of 25 or more employees in a calendar quarter. For some companies, however, the effective date could fall after January 1975. If a firm has a multiyear health contract in force then, the HMO option need not be offered until the contract expires.

Another condition on the offer: an employer won't have to pay more for the HMO alternative than he already does for current health insurance plans or Blue Cross/Blue Shield. "If HMO benefits cost more, and the employee wants it, then it is up to him to pay for it," William McHenry, the U. S. Chamber of Commerce's economic security manager, advised national and state chamber personnel this month.

Further, the option will apply only if there's a qualified HMO in the area where employees live. It's up to the secretary of the Dept. of Health, Education & Welfare (HEW) to determine

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