

THE COURIER-JOURNAL - TUESDAY - FEBRUARY 7, 1974

HOSPITAL TO TEST VINYL CHLORIDE WORKERS FREE

Washington - The cancer scare set off by the deaths of four men at a Louisville plant has led labor officials to arrange for free medical examinations at a New York hospital for any workers exposed to vinyl chloride.

Peter Bommarito, president of the United Rubber Workers (URW), said that any vinyl chloride worker in the country will be admitted for examination without charge at the Mount Sinai Hospital in New York.

Angelo Oefalo, a vice president of the International Association of Machinists, said the labor unions will pick up the travel costs for workers who travel to the New York hospital.

No accurate figures are available, but it is believed that between 5,000 and 6,500 workers are exposed to vinyl chloride vapors, which have been linked to angiosarcoma, a rare liver cancer that killed four men at the B.F. Goodrich plant in Louisville.

Goodrich first disclosed late last month that the cancer deaths may have been job-related.

BFG22615

22775001

THE LOUISVILLE TIMES

Wednesday Evening, February 6, 1974

FREE MEDICAL EXAMS MADE AVAILABLE TO VINYL CHLORIDE WORKERS

By Ward Sinclair

WASHINGTON -- The cancer scare set off by the deaths of four men at a Louisville plant has led labor officials to arrange for free medical examinations at a New York hospital for any workers exposed to vinyl chloride.

Peter Bommarito, president of the United Rubber Workers (URW), said that any vinyl chloride worker in the industry will be admitted for examination without charge at the Mount Sinai Hospital in New York.

Angelo Cefalo, a vice president of the International Association of Machinists, and the labor unions will pick up the travel costs for workers who travel to the New York hospital.

No accurate figures are available, but it is believed that between 5,000 and 6,500 workers are exposed to vinyl chloride vapors, which have been linked to angiosarcoma, a rare liver cancer that killed four men at the B.F. Goodrich plant in Louisville.

Since Goodrich first disclosed late last month that the cancer deaths may have been job-related, officials have determined that at least four other employees at the Bells Lane plant in Louisville have early stages of liver disease that may be connected with vinyl chloride exposure.

Bommarito's announcement today is part of a broader plan being developed by the industrial union department of the AFL-CIO to develop a system of early diagnosis and treatment of disease induced by the chemical.

(more)

BFG22616

22775002

The medical examination program will be supervised by Dr. Irving Selikoff, a noted industrial-hygiene researcher at Mount Sinai. Bommarito said emergency funds from the hospital, the American Cancer Society and the National Institute for Health Sciences will finance the examinations.

The reports out of Louisville, tracing four deaths between 1968 and last December, have led government and private medical officials to conclude that vinyl chloride is the probable cause of what is described as a "new" occupational disease.

Bommarito said that since angiosarcoma was discovered in 1913, only about 50 cases have been reported in worldwide medical literature. On that scale, the Louisville situation is regarded of epidemic proportions.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), an arm of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, has recommended that new interim controls be established at the Goodrich plant in Louisville to protect workers from vinyl chloride exposure.

The chemical is one of a number of substances used in the production of polyvinyl chloride, a plastic used to make phonograph records, pipe, food and drink containers and other industrial products.

The four Louisville deaths and the four other liver-disease cases reported there have occurred in the Bells Lane production unit, which currently employs about 250 workers.

The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) enforces a standard of 500 parts of polyvinyl chloride vapors per million parts of air in the Louisville plant and others like it around the country.

(more)

BFG22617

22775003

3--THE LOUISVILLE TIMES, FEB. 6/

Goodrich officials contend that they voluntarily strive to meet a self-imposed standard that is 10 times more stringent than the federal requirement.

Sheldon W. Samuels, director of health and safety for the industrial union department, said that the AFL-CIO has initiated a nationwide study in the polyvinyl chloride industry to come up with more medical information.

One aim of the study, Samuels said, will be to force OSHA to lower its industry-wide health standard in the chemical plants. NIOSH, meanwhile, is accelerating a study of its own on the cause-and-effect relationship between the rare liver cancer and vinyl chloride.

The standard now being enforced by OSHA was set in 1968 to protect workers from bone, skin, blood vessel and kidney disease -- before there were indications that angiosarcoma might be another result of exposure to the chemical vapors.

Despite that, Samuels noted that some companies voluntarily have moved to enforce standards that are tougher than OSHA's. Among them, he said, are B.F. Goodrich and the Dow Chemical Co., whose researchers determined in 1961 that a 50-parts-per-million standard was necessary.

The Department of Labor has scheduled a hearing for Feb. 15 in Washington to hear testimony that could lead to a toughening of the federal standard.

And the AFL-CIO will conduct a briefing on Feb. 12 in Cleveland to bring industry and labor representatives up to date on new developments in the situation. The meeting originally was to be held in Akron.