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Liver cancer ruled industrial disease

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. — An official of the Kentucky Occupational Safety and Health Administration reports that the federal government has declared a rare liver cancer which has taken the lives of four Louisville B. F. Goodrich Co. employees as a new occupational disease.

"Right now, the only four known cases of this disease are right here in Louisville, but this thing has tremendous implications nationally and internationally," said Dr. J. Bradford Block, medical consultant for the administration.

Block said the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health made the decision to label angiosarcoma as an occupational disease during an all-day meeting in Washington Friday.

Block said two pathologists from the National Institutes of Health and the National Cancer Institute confirmed that angiosarcoma, the liver cancer, took the lives of four employees who worked in the polyvinyl chloride process at the Goodrich plant here.

He added that 13 plants across the nation manufacture vinyl chloride and

another 15 use it in such a way as to expose their employees to it. He said authorities estimate that as many as 6,500 workers have been exposed to vinyl chloride throughout the United States.

Block said national health officials are placing special emphasis on results expected next week of further testing of 55 workers in the Louisville Goodrich plant, whose previous blood tests showed abnormalities. They were among 271 employees tested at the plant.

The Louisville facility uses vinyl chloride in the processing of a plastic for manufacture of phonograph records and some food containers.

Block said Goodrich records show at least 29 employees at its Louisville installation have died of cancer since the facility went into operation in the 1940s. Of that number, 22 worked with vinyl chloride, Block said.

He said the four whose deaths have been attributed to angiosarcoma all died within the last six years and all probably were exposed to high concentrations of vinyl chloride during clearing operations.

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