

WRITTEN QUESTION No 593/74

by Mr Kater and Mr Willi Müller

to the Commission of the European Communities

(23 December 1974)

Subject: The health risk involved in the manufacture of PVC

In answer to our Written Question No 645/73 ⁽¹⁾ given in the middle of this year, the Commission stated that it would ask the International Agency for Research on Cancer of Lyons for available data on the toxicity of vinyl chloride and polyvinyl chloride, in order to take whatever practical action is possible in the light of the most up to date scientific knowledge. In the meantime new discoveries have been made which have, for example, led the authority responsible in the United States, OSHA, to impose new restrictions on the handling of substances used

⁽¹⁾ OJ No C 53, 9. 5. 1974, p. 15.

in manufacturing PVC. In addition there are now numerous reports from Community countries which bear out the conclusion that the products referred to are highly dangerous to health and carcinogenic.

We ask the Commission:

1. Has the Commission carried out the follow-up to which it referred in answer to our question and what findings has it obtained?
2. Does the Commission appreciate that, purely as a precaution, measures should be taken immediately to draw up Community regulations to deal effectively with the risks involved in the production of PVC?

Answer

(7 February 1975)

1. Yes. The Commission is in close touch with the International Agency for Research on Cancer (CIRC) at Lyons, which has defined a methodology for compiling data on a large scale. The expert group which has been commissioned to pursue these enquiries on behalf of the CIRC has just begun work. The Commission will inform the Honourable Members of its findings as soon as they are available.

The Commission also organized a scientific conference in Brussels on 17 and 18 September 1974 on the dangers of vinyl chloride monomer, a basic product used in the manufacture of many plastics, for workers and the environment.

There was broad agreement among those present that effective prevention must from the outset be based on a strict epidemiological approach. Concrete proposals were made and the Commission undertook to encourage and coordinate work in progress.

Information on 'new' industrial diseases and the criteria permitting their early diagnosis would be gathered by the Commission.

Lastly, it was proposed that a comparative study of methods, apparatus and legislation should be initiated to make controls more effective and results more comparable. This programme should lead to stricter supervision of workplaces and reduce the risks to workers who inhale vinyl chloride monomer vapours.

The Commission will publish the proceedings of this conference in the first half of 1975.

2. The Commission intends to call a meeting of government experts in the near future to examine the feasibility of the Community defining basic principles for protecting workers and the general public from vinyl chloride monomer poisoning.