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cc: Mr. C. H. Zeanah - Richmond

The following article appeared in today's Houston Post:

EPA finds faint vinyl chloride leaks

By HAROLD SCARLETT
Post Environment Writer

Four plants on the Houston Ship Channel are leaking insignificant and barely detectable levels of cancer-causing vinyl chloride gas, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) said Wednesday.

Results of air samples taken here May 21-22—and ruled secret for a time—were released by the EPA regional office in Dallas.

A press officer, Betty Williamson, said there is no scientific evidence of any public health hazard at the levels found here.

"But these are preliminary data," she said. "and we plan to do additional monitoring in Houston."

The EPA said the highest level of vinyl chloride found here was .063 parts per million (PPM) in a property-line sample at the Shell chemical plant. A second sample at

Shell showed only .032 PPM, the EPA said.

Trace amounts of less than .03 PPM were found in tests outside the Tenneco, Diamond Shamrock and Ethyl plants, the EPA said.

The Ship Channel levels

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4 vinyl chloride leaks found

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were among the lowest found in a nationwide sampling by the EPA of plants making vinyl chloride, a gas used in the manufacture of polyvinyl chloride plastics.

The EPA began the sampling program after the discovery earlier this year of 12 deaths from angiosarcoma, a rare liver cancer, among workers in vinyl chloride plants.

However, the dead workers had been exposed for many years to permitted in-plant levels of up to 500 PPM of vinyl chloride.

The in-plant exposure limit has since been slashed to 30 PPM. It is expected to be reduced again to near-zero levels.

Disclosure of the Houston sampling results followed a Tuesday announcement in Washington by EPA administrators of 2 or 3 PPM or more

found outside 11 plants around trator Russell E. Train that of vinyl chloride had been the nation.

"There is no scientific evidence to indicate that these emissions pose an imminent hazard to people living near these plants," Train said.

"However, prudence dictates that reasonable steps should be promptly taken to reduce vinyl chloride emissions to the lowest practical level."

Train met with executives of 29 vinyl chloride plants and urged them to reduce emissions as much as possible.

The regional EPA said it had found 7.81 PPM of vinyl chloride in one sampling outside a Goodyear plant at Plaquemines, La. Another vinyl chloride plant operated by Dow Chemical Co. is right next door, the EPA said.

The EPA said the high reading was taken with a 10-mile wind blowing directly across the Goodyear plant toward the sampling point.

But 30 other samples taken in the same area ranged as low as .003 PPM, the EPA said.

Both the Houston and Louisiana samples were taken by the EPA's Houston laboratory facility. It has not sampled two other vinyl chloride plants in this area—Union Carbide at Texas City and Dow in Freeport.

An EPA official in Washington originally directed EPA field offices around the country not to release results of the vinyl chloride samplings.

This appeared to be in violation of the 1970 federal Clean Air Act, which declares all pollution sampling data to be public information.

However, the EPA later announced the test results were being held up only temporarily for correlation and evaluation.

Meanwhile, an EPA research team from Research Triangle Park, N.C., was setting up its gear in Houston Wednesday to do additional testing for vinyl chloride and a number of other exotic pollutants.

The team was to have begun sampling June 5, but was delayed by equipment problems.

EC 3343

D. J. Kennedy