Less Vinyl Chloride Exposure Is Opposed

WASHINGTON (AP) — The plastics industry warns that proposed government rules to drastically reduce workers' exposure to a cancer-causing chemical could mean the loss of 1.6 million jobs.

This was one of the points to be made by the industry during a week-long public hearing opening today at the Labor Department.

The department's Occupational Safety and Health Administration has proposed permanent restrictions that would limit air levels of vinyl chloride in plants to less than one part per million, or too small to be detected. The current emergency standard is 50 parts per million.

Vinyl chloride, the foundation for much of the modern plastics industry, is the center of a growing worldwide controversy over its potential health hazard to workers and possibly consumers.

The government imposed the temporary emergency standard after the discovery earlier this year that exposure to vinyl chloride may be a cause of a rae form of liver cancer known as angiosarcoma.

The B. F. Goodrich Co. disclosed in January that four workers at its vinyl chloride conversion plant in Louisville, Ky., died from the disease. Since then, 20 cases world-wide have been linked to workers at plants where the vinyl chloride gas is produced or converted into polyvinyl chloride.

About 6,500 U.S. workers are involved in making vinyl chloride and turning it into polyvinyl chloride, a solid plastic used in countless products including paints, pipes, floor tiles, toys, food packaging, phonograph records and clothing.

At first it was thought the danger involved only the workers at the first stage of the manufacturing process but scientists have now turned up evidence indicating that as many as 700,000 workers could be exposed to the danger.

A total of 95 witnesses, representing government, the medical community and the big plastics and chemical manufacturers, have asked to testify at the hearings.

The Society of the Plastics Industry Inc. contends that if the government's proposed "no detectable level" is adopted, scores of plants will be forced to close immediately, resulting in the loss of 1.6 million jobs at a cost to the economy of $65 billion.

Labor Secretary Peter J. Brennan, in a statement issued before the hearing, did not comment on the industry's claim of lost jobs.

"The purpose of this hearing this week is to elicit additional information from those in the industry — employers and employes — and others concerning the hazards from exposure to vinyl chloride, the best means of protection and the impact of the proposed standard," Brennan said.

The industry argues that while it favors reducing workers' exposure "to as low a level as possible," the proposed standard is impossible to achieve with today's engineering technology.

Industry sources indicated that the industry will propose an exposure level below the current temporary level of 50 parts per million, but somewhat above the government's proposed zero level.

AKRON BEACON JOURNAL
AKRON, OHIO
D. 175,468 SUN. 203,118

JUN 26 1974

DANVILLE, VA.
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D. 17,000

JUN 25 1974

On Vinyl Chloride

Industry Urges Reducing Controls

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Beacon Journal Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Warning of industry shutdowns if strict controls on vinyl chloride are adopted, a spokesman for the plastics makers Tuesday called for a phased reduction of vinyl chloride particles in the air in their plants.

Anton Vittone, president of B. F. Goodrich Chemical Co. and chairman of the Society of the Plastics Industry Vinyl Chloride committee, testified at the opening hearings on a proposed health and safety standard for vinyl chloride workers.

Vittone asked the Federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to phase in a new standard over the next three years rather than put a permanent standard into effect this Fall.

UNDER an existing emergency standard set in April by OSHA, vinyl chloride makers must keep the chemical levels down to 50 parts per million.

Labor union officials and industrial hygienists urged OSHA to stick to a proposed permanent standard, to go into effect in October, of "no detectable level" of vinyl chloride in factory working spaces.

Vittone told Department of Labor officials at the hearings that "the proposed permanent standard is not technologically feasible and, if adopted, would shut down the industry." It could cost as many as 2.2 million jobs, industry spokesman said.

Prolonged exposure to vinyl chloride has been closely linked to a rare form of liver cancer, as well as to other organic diseases. Twenty-one deaths from liver cancer have struck vinyl chloride workers.

DR. IRVING Selikoff, medical professor at Mt. Sinai School of Medicine in New York and a recognized authority on industrial diseases, told hearing examiners:

"Clinical examinations of 354 workers exposed to vinyl chloride ... demonstrated a significant prevalence of liver abnormalities, peripheral vascular (vein) changes and lung abnormalities. The latter may reflect exposure to polyvinyl chloride dust, rather than to the monomer gas."

Dr. H. F. Kraybill, a staffer at the National Cancer Institute, testified that experiments with rats, mice and hamsters by the Manufacturing Chemists Association also linked vinyl chloride to liver cancers at relatively low levels of concentration in the air.

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