New Rules Set to Reduce Vinyl Chloride Risk

From News Dispatches

The Labor Department yesterday announced new rules to drastically cut the amount of cancer-causing vinyl chloride gas to which factory workers may be exposed. One plastics company said the action threatens to throw 2 million workers out of their jobs.

The new rules from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) came after several months of growing evidence that workers exposed to the widely used plastics industry gas were developing a rare but fatal form of liver cancer. Deaths around the world traced to workplace exposure now number more than 20.

The Society of the Plastics Industry, Inc., filed a suit in Second U.S Circuit Court of Appeals in New York asking for the judicial review of the OSHA standard.

It said the standard announced yesterday is unrealistic and it will be impossible for most if not all of the industry to meet it.

Last April 5, OSHA announced that workers could be exposed to no more than 50 parts per million of vinyl chloride gas in the air and proposed eventually reducing the exposure level to zero.

During lengthy hearings on the matter the industry claimed it would be impossible to meet a detectable level of the gas inside the factories.

Under the new regulations, effective Friday, the present 50-part-per-million exposure level will be allowed until Dec. 31. After next Jan. 1 workers may be exposed to no more than 1 part per million average over eight hours of exposure and no concentration higher than 5 parts per million over any 15-minute period.

After Jan. 1 of 1976, the same exposure levels will be required except that workers exposed to anything stronger will have to wear respirators.

Firestone Plastics Co. said the new rules put the industry "on a collision course with economic disaster." An official of the firm said the restrictions would "throw 2 million jobs down the drain."

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