

Cancer Experts Warn of Dangers In Some Plastic Wrap Chemicals

By JANE E. BRODY

The finding by a leading Italian researcher that a chemical used in some plastic food wraps can cause cancer in mice prompted two American cancer experts yesterday to alert the public and Government agencies to the need for closer scrutiny of this and related chemicals.

At a news conference at the New York Academy of Sciences, Dr. E. Cuyler Hammond and Dr. Irving J. Selikoff said that the chemical, called vinylidene chloride, was closely related to two other cancer-causing chemicals, vinyl chloride and trichloroethylene.

However, researchers at the Dow Chemical Company, the leading manufacturer of vinylidene chloride, said the Italian finding was of questionable significance and cited a two-year, \$1-million study sponsored by American industries that showed no cancer-inducing effect of vinylidene chloride in rats.

In addition, Dow researchers said that studies of foods wrapped in plastics made from vinylidene chloride had showed that none of the chemical migrated from the wrapping to the food. The test would have disclosed such contamination if it exceeded 10 parts of vinylidene chloride in one billion parts of food.

In the Italian study, conducted by Dr. Cesare Maltoni at the Institute of Oncology in Bologna, rats, hamsters and mice were exposed to vinylidene chloride gas at much higher levels—starting at 10 parts per million—for up to one year. Kidney cancers developed in about 20 percent of the male Swiss mice, but in none of the other animals.

Three years ago, Dr. Maltoni's studies of vinyl chloride, another plastics chemical, showed it to cause cancer in rats and mice. Shortly afterward the chemical was pinpointed as the cause of a rare, fatal liver cancer in exposed workers. Dr. Maltoni's studies of vinylidene chloride were begun at the behest of four European producers.

Vinylidene chloride is a gaseous chemical that, when polymerized with vinyl chloride, makes up Saran Wrap, a Dow product. (Other packaged plastic wraps are made of polyethylene.) The vinylidene chloride-vinyl chloride copolymer—called saran—is also used to wrap commercially prepared meats and cheeses. A Dow spokesman said that about one-third of the flexible plastic packaging for food in grocery stores is saran, representing an annual market of between 150 and 200 million pounds of plastic.

In announcing their concern about Dr.

Maltoni's findings, Dr. Hammond, a vice president of the American Cancer Society, and Dr. Selikoff, director of environmental medicine at Mount Sinai Medical Center, said they saw no reason for the public to stop using saran products. But Dr. Hammond suggested that industry might try to remove residual vinylidene chloride from the finished plastic before it came into contact with food.

They said that Dr. Maltoni's finding warranted further examination by the Food and Drug Administration, the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health and the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

In a related development, the Natural Resources Defense Council has asked the Food and Drug Administration to recall existing stocks of Coca Cola in plastic bottles made from acrylonitrile, also called vinyl cyanide and another chemical relative of vinyl chloride. In response to a suit brought by the council in 1975, the drug agency last Friday rescinded its approval of market tests of the plastic soda bottles.

The agency's decision was based on recent findings that acrylonitrile causes birth defects and tumors in test animals and that small amounts of the chemical leach out of the bottles into the drink.



DELIGHT IN THE RAIN: Youngsters in Sacramento launching flat-bottomed boat in flooded gutter about one and one-half inches of rain fell on stricken Northern California. Precipitation also

Fuel Economy in '77 Cars Reported as 6%

WASHINGTON, Feb. 22 (AP)—Overall fuel economy in 1977 model cars is 6 percent better than in last year's models, the Environmental Protection Agency reported today.

The E.P.A. issued a new list of auto mileage figures including testing conducted both last fall and earlier this year.

Taking first place in this year's mileage listings was the Honda Civic CVCC, which was rated at 52 miles a gallon on the highway and 40 in city traffic.

Over all, the agency said, the autos and small trucks that were tested averaged 18.6 miles a gallon of gasoline. This is 6 percent better than 1976 results and

a 34 percent improvement on 1974.

The E.P.A. tested more than 500 vehicles to determine emission compliance and fuel economy. In addition, 200 prototype vehicles were tested by manufacturers, and the results were confirmed by the Federal agency.

The Volkswagen Rabbit Diesel was the No. 2 rated auto this year at 37 miles a gallon in the city and 52 on the highway. Placing third through fifth, with the city and highway figures recorded, were the Datsun B210, 37 and 50; Honda Accord CVCC, 38 and 48, and Toyota Corolla, 36 and 49.

Completing the top 10 were the Volk-

swagen L 808, 35; Chevrolet Colt, 29; a Volkswagen model 1977.

In the professional testing is tests and to be confirmed by officials.

E.P.A. predicts the

NAVY BOMBING PROTESTER SEIZED ON PACIFIC ISLAND

HONOLULU, Feb. 22, (UPI)—One of 15 persons who invaded Kahoolawe to protest the Navy use of the island for bombing practice was arrested yesterday.

The Coast Guard identified him as



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