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Government moves to reduce worker exposure

New safety standards on vinyl chloride announced

CHICAGO (AP) — The government announced on Tuesday new safety standards to reduce worker exposure to the cancer-causing gas vinyl chloride.

John H. Stender, assistant Secretary of Labor, said the new Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards won't cause any industry shutdowns. But the industry reacted quickly, denouncing the regulations and filing lawsuits seeking judicial review.

The current allowable level will remain in effect until Jan. 1, 1975, Stender said. Present regulations allow worker handling polymer vinyl chloride to be exposed to up to 50 parts per million in eight hours.

The new standards state that in 1975 the level must drop to an average of one to five parts per million over eight hours and can't exceed 25 parts per million unless workers have special respiratory equipment.

By Jan. 1, 1976, Stender said,

any worker exposed to more than five parts per million of the chemical must be provided a respirator. Until then, respirators are optional, he said, for workers exposed from five to 25 parts per million, but anyone wanting such an air-purifying device must have it provided.

Todd C. Walker, president of the Firestone Plastics Co., a division of the Firestone Tire & Rubber Co., called the standards "economically unrealistic,

technically infeasible, politically motivated and medically ridiculous, comparable to a law aimed at stopping automobile deaths by lowering the speed limit to one mile per hour."

Stender said some of the 7,500 polymer and fabricating plants in the United States employing about 350,000 workers will have trouble meeting the tightened standards. However, he said there would be provisions to allow a company that can't meet the standards to reduce the out-

put to the lowest practical level, provided workers are given respirators.

"This will not cause the industry a shut down," Stender added.

But Walker charged that "the OSHA standard for vinyl chloride exposure puts the vinyl plastics industry on a collision course with economic disaster. More importantly, it throws two million jobs down the drain, according to an economic impact study made earlier

this year by Arthur Little & Co., an industrial consulting firm.

He said his company plans to challenge the standards.

Polyvinyl chloride substances are used in a host of plastics products.

In April, OSHA ordered an emergency lowering from the then-prevailing limit of 500 parts per million, after several deaths from a rare liver cancer were thought to be related to handling the chemical.

Preliminary tests conducted in Northbrook, Ill., later that month showed that test mice developed liver cancer when exposed to concentrations of 50 parts per million of vinyl chloride.

Criminal provisions of the standards include a maximum \$10,000 fine and six months' im-

prisonment.

The Society of the Plastics Industry Inc. (SPI), which represents more than 90 per cent of vinyl chloride and polyvinyl chloride products, filed suit in New York asking the U.S. Court of Appeals for judicial review. A separate suit was filed by the Hooker Chemical Co. of Stamford, Conn.

In a statement, SPI President

Ralph L. Harding said the government "may believe it has adopted a compromise position between organized labor on the one hand and industry on the other, but the result is the standard that does not take into account in a practical way the known medical and technological facts."

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