

File
Vinylidene chloride

10A Wed., February 23, 1977 ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Warns Of Chemical In Plastic Wraps

Compiled From News Services

NEW YORK, Feb. 23 — The finding by a leading Italian researcher that a chemical used in some plastic food wraps can cause cancer in mice has prompted two United States cancer experts to alert the public and Government agencies to the need for closer scrutiny of the chemical and others.

At a press conference yesterday, Dr. E. Cuyler Hammond and Dr. Irving J. Selikoff said 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. The Dow spokesmen cited a two-year, \$1,000,000 study sponsored by American industries that showed no cancer-inducing effect of vinylidene chloride in rats.

Vinylidene chloride is a gaseous chemical that, when polymerized with vinyl chloride, makes Saran Wrap, a Dow product. (Other packaged plastic wraps are polyethylene.)

In the Italian study, conducted by Dr. Cesare Maltoni, rats, hamsters and mice were exposed to vinylidene chloride gas at high levels for up to one year. Kidney cancers developed in about 20 per cent of the male Swiss mice, but in none of the other animals.

Three years ago, 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.

A Dow spokesman said that one third of the flexible plastic packaging for food in grocery shelves was made from vinylidene chloride. But he noted that studies of foods wrapped in such plastics had shown that none of the chemical migrated from the wrapping to the food.

Hammond said he, personally, would continue to use plastic food wraps. Asked how consumers should react to his warning against vinylidene chloride, he said, "It is my personal opinion that consumers at this point need have no worry." His warning was intended to protect them from possible future risk, he said.

Carter

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.

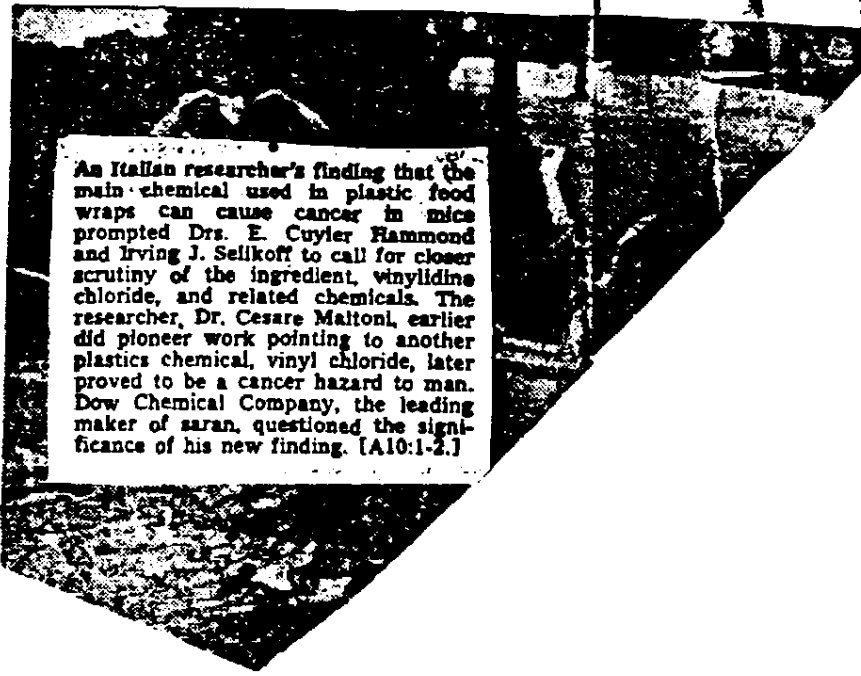
Maltoni's findings, Dr. Hammond, a vice president of the American Cancer Society, and Dr. Selikoff, director of environmental medicine at Mount Sinai Medical Center, said they saw no reason for the public to stop using saran products. But Dr. Hammond suggested that industry might try to remove residual 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.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 1977



An Italian researcher's finding that the main chemical used in plastic food wraps can cause cancer in mice prompted Drs. E. Cuyler Hammond and Irving J. Selikoff to call for closer scrutiny of the ingredient, vinylidene chloride, and related chemicals. The researcher, Dr. Cesare Maltoni, earlier did pioneer work pointing to another plastics chemical, vinyl chloride, later proved to be a cancer hazard to man. Dow Chemical Company, the leading maker of saran, questioned the significance of his new finding. [A10:1-2.]