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B. F. Goodrich to upgrade vinyl-chloride monitoring

By DENNIS POLITE

Louisville Times Staff Writer

The B. F. Goodrich Co. plant on Bells Lane says it will upgrade its monitoring standards for workers who are exposed to vinyl chloride.

The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) cited the plant last month for failure to properly monitor worker exposure to vinyl chloride.

The citation was issued after an earlier visit to the plant by a federal occupational hygienist.

Goodrich has decided not to contest the citation, and will bring its monitoring procedure for workers into line with the federal standard, according to Frank Flanagan, area OSHA director. He said the company was very cooperative.

Says company cooperative

Specifically, the citation charged that the company failed "to monitor a sufficient number of employees so that a representative sample of exposure to vinyl chloride may be determined."

Flanagan's office emphasized, as did the company, that it did not find exposure levels above the government standard when it visited the plant. The standard is no more than 50 parts of vinyl chloride per million parts of air.

Vinyl chloride is a gas. It is used in the production of polyvinyl chloride, a building block for many plastics.

Exposure to vinyl chloride is thought to cause the rare liver cancer, angiosarcoma. There have been six deaths of former Goodrich workers from that cancer since 1965.

The latest death was uncovered recently. Two other workers, both living, also have the cancer.

Sparks company's action

When Goodrich announced in January that it suspected that exposure to vinyl chloride caused the cancer, it sparked a number of actions by government and the industry.

One of the government's actions was to install a temporary standard on the

amount of exposure to workers, and conditions for monitoring exposure. The standard was 500 parts per million; it was changed to 50.

It was a portion of this temporary standard of which Goodrich was found in violation.

The standard requires in part that workers wear a monitoring device on their uniforms to record the amount of vinyl chloride in the air.

Goodrich had monitoring devices, but none of the type called for in the standard.

A statement by the company said, "The company pointed out to OSHA that in addition to personnel monitoring, B. F. Goodrich has been doing extensive monitoring even beyond that required in the temporary standard."

The company said it is installing the procedures as called for in the standard. It said it did not contest the OSHA citation "in order to settle the matter promptly."

Flanagan said the visit to Goodrich by the hygienist was prompted by the company's involvement with vinyl chloride.

Says chemical 'target health hazard'

He said the chemical is a "target health hazard" and as such gets special attention from health and safety officials.

It was added to a list which contains such things as asbestos and lead, after it was determined that exposure to vinyl chloride possibly caused cancer, Flanagan said.

Although Kentucky has its own occupational health and safety standards, Flanagan said, the temporary standard on vinyl chloride is not among the state regulations.

Since the federal standard is more stringent, it applies to Goodrich rather than a state rule, he said.

Under the federal rule, Goodrich must sample exposure no less frequently than weekly, until it gets results showing the level below 50 parts per million parts of air for three consecutive weeks. Then the monitoring can be done monthly, as long as no readings are above 50.

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