

Washington newsletter

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The Occupational Safety and Health Administration is under fire on three fronts. Labor contends the agency is not moving swiftly and decisively enough to clean up workplace hazards; industry views the potential cost of adhering to OSHA's rules as exorbitant; and Congress is beginning to wonder whether the three-and-a-half-year-old agency is doing its job. Under prodding by the Senate Labor Subcommittee, OSHA has promised to issue the remaining 15 of 16 safety standards recommended by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), including standards for lead, mercury, beryllium and sulfur dioxide. So far, only an asbestos standard has been promulgated. Standards for vinyl chloride and carcinogens have been proposed, but only as a result of public pressure. In addition to investigating complaints about OSHA, the committee, headed by Senator Harrison Williams (D., N.J.), will consider at least 10 bills to amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act. Almost certain to emerge is a general bill calling for consultative services for small businesses on OSHA matters, bigger budgets for OSHA and NIOSH and a more prominent spot for NIOSH in the Health, Education and Welfare Dept.

World oil prices could drop \$1.50/bbl. if the Saudi Arabian oil auction, unexpectedly scheduled for August, results in sales of 2 million bbls./day. That's the view of U.S. officials who met with Saudi Arabian government leaders last week to discuss joint economic cooperation. And if 4 million bbls./day are sold, it could lower the average price of oil on the world market by \$2-3/bbl. or more. However, because of the current world oil surplus the bidding may not bring in sales of even 2 million bbls./day. Saudi Arabia's Oil Minister Sheik Zaki Yamani estimates there is a world oil surplus of 4-5%. Treasury Secretary William Simon says there will be a production surplus of 1.5-2 million bbls./day for the rest of 1974. Some U.S. officials feel that even if prices drop, demand will not increase. They say the Arab oil embargo was a "strategic mistake," which spurred the U.S. and other Western nations to stress oil conservation and develop alternative energy sources.

Offshore oil tracts in the Gulf of Alaska will be leased earlier than the environmentally less risky ones off New England, New York and New Jersey. That's the indication environmental groups are getting from the Interior Dept., which apparently is siding with industry despite objections by the White House Council on Environmental Quality. CEQ opposes the Alaskan site because of the dangers of earthquakes and ocean currents. But the oil companies are lobbying for Alaska because drilling would be near proved oil fields and because it is expected to result in less public opposition than would offshore drilling along the East Coast.

Procedures for handling civil suits against pesticide law violators will soon be formalized by the Environmental Protection Agency. EPA has been operating under interim regulations since 1972, when amendments to the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act provided for fines of up to \$5,000 under civil actions. Only criminal suits had been allowed previously.

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