

Carbide Results Negative In a Brain Cancer Study

Union Carbide Corporation has told employees at its Texas City, Tex. petrochemical plant that epidemiology studies could find no correlation between brain cancer cases and employee exposure to chemicals used or manufactured at the plant.

Both Union Carbide and the National Institute of Occupational Safety & Health have been conducting separate studies — using the same data base — to determine whether there might be an excess of deaths due to brain cancer among the plant population and, if so, whether the excess could be associated with occupational exposure to chemicals.

The results of Union Carbide's investigation indicated that the overall mortality rate of employees working at Texas City since 1941 is significantly less than the national average (765 observed versus 923.82 expected). Of the 765 deaths which occurred

among 6,588 employees, twelve were due to primary malignant brain cancer, the company says. By comparison with national rates, 7.42 would have been expected. Finally, no correlation could be found between brain cancer cases and employee exposure to chemicals used or manufactured at the Texas City plant.

In a letter mailed to each employee of the Texas City facility, plant manager Damon L. Engle and plant physician Dr. David H. Glenn stated that they believe the four to five cases of brain cancer "may represent a chance occurrence and that these cases are not due to chemical exposure at our plant."

The letter listed three reasons for this: "First, we have not been able to associate these brain cancer cases with any particular chemical exposure. Second, the types of brain cancer are present in the same percentages as that seen in the general population. Ordinarily, chemically caused cancer is a specific and often unusual type, different than those seen in the general population. Finally, excessive brain cancer has not been confirmed in chemical plants similar to ours in other parts of the country."

Commenting on the epidemiology study and the company's internal communications efforts, Mr. Engle said, "In any study of this nature, our foremost responsibility is to the employees. My message to them is that there is no cause for alarm. However small in number, deaths due to cancer have and will continue to receive our attention and concern."

"Our exhaustive studies," he continued, "neither indicate that any deaths due to brain cancer have been caused by occupational exposure, nor do they suggest any changes to our existing employee health programs or production procedures. We do, however, plan to continue our investigations as well as our cooperation with NIOSH."

"We firmly believe the present standards and practices employed by Union Carbide at Texas City provide adequate protection from known health hazards," Mr. Engle adds. "In the unlikely event we learn of a hazardous exposure, we will take whatever action necessary to further protect the health of our employees."