

OSHA Proposes Ban All Vinyl Chloride Exposure

The Labor Dept. has proposed a flat ban on worker exposure to vinyl chloride — the cancer-causing gas whose killer potential has been certified by the world's leading industrial health experts.

It has adopted—at least tentatively—the contention of the trade union movement that there is no safe level of exposure, that no worker should be exposed to any detectable level of vinyl chloride in the air he breathes.

Last month, the AFL-CIO Industrial Union Dept. had sharply criticized the emergency temporary standard set by the Occupational Safety & Health Administration. It allowed up to 50 parts vinyl chloride per 1 million parts of air (50 ppm.).

This was only one-tenth of the previous standard, but labor's position was that the only justified standard was "no detectable level" of exposure.

The gas, vinyl chloride, is used to make polyvinyl chloride, or PVC, the solid plastic employed in a wide range of industrial and consumer products.

The Labor Dept. has invited comment on the proposed "no detectable level" standard from interested parties and will consider them before making a final decision on a permanent standard.

Labor safety experts, while welcoming the proposal for the vinyl chloride exposure ban, were studying the standard for its applicability to the larger problem of workers dealing with PCV, the solid plastic. While only some 6,500 workers are employed in the basic vinyl chloride industry, nearly 1

million are in jobs involving use of PVC.

Scientific studies have found the vinyl chloride health hazard present in the manufacture of PVC products. PVC is shaped into industrial and consumer products through melting, molding, extrusion, forming and other processes. The end results include PVC pipe, floor tile, wire coating, auto parts, apparel and plastic wrap.

Vinyl chloride was linked earlier this year to the deaths of several workers at a B. F. Goodrich Co. PVC plant in Louisville, Ky. They died of angiosarcoma of the liver—until then, a rare form of cancer.

To date, there are 13 recorded cases of vinyl chloride liver cancer in the United States and studies have found that hundreds of vinyl chloride workers have "abnormal" liver functions.

The federal safety law requires the Labor Dept. to promulgate a permanent standard within six months after a temporary standard is issued. Before the temporary standard was set Apr. 5, concentrations of vinyl chloride were permitted in workplaces up to 500 ppm.

In outlining the proposed standard for "no detectable level" Assistant Labor Sec. John H. Stender

said the provisions would include:

- Limiting the manufacture, use or handling of vinyl chloride to regulated areas.
- Monitoring the atmosphere of regulated areas to determine individual worker exposure.
- Allowing workers or their union representatives to observe the monitoring.
- Initiating programs for respiratory protection of workers in regulated areas when measurable levels of vinyl chloride are detected.
- Requiring protective clothing for workers in regulated areas.

- Providing medical examinations annually at no expense to workers and maintaining records for 20 years or longer.

The Labor Dept proposal published in the May 10 Federal Register states that the standard would apply to all vinyl chloride processes and to "operations involving polyvinyl chloride where detectable levels of vinyl chloride are released."

But the proposal also specifies: "This section does not apply to the handling or use of fabricated products made entirely, or in part of polyvinyl chloride."

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Health For All

Work Hazardous to Your Health

The Public Health Service says that 100,000 workers die from on-the-job exposure. Each year. The deaths are caused from exposure to poisonous chemicals, dusts, noise, heat, cold, radiation, and other conditions at work.

In addition, the PHS estimates dusts like silica—cause severe lung all of which are untested for possible long-term effects on workers who handle and inhale them. There is almost no testing at all of combinations of substances that may be harmless by themselves but become deadly when combined.

Although an occupational health law was passed in 1970, enforcement is almost no testing at all of combinations of substances that may be harmless by themselves but become deadly when combined.

In thousands of plants, workers who do not even know what chemicals they work with; to protect trade secrets, companies keep records of the substances only by code numbers. And unless a federal safety standard exists for the chemical, the company is not required to monitor worker exposure to poisonous agents or to perform periodic medical examinations on those exposed.

To find out more about occupational diseases and what should be done to protect your lungs at work, contact your Kentucky Lung Association. It's a matter of life and breath.

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