

Vinyl chloride fills the air, expert says

NEW YORK (AP)—More than 200 million pounds of vinyl chloride escapes into the atmosphere each year from U.S. factories, an Environmental Protection Agency scientist said yesterday.

Nineteen cases of a rare liver cancer, angiosarcoma, 13 of them in the United States, have been discovered among workers exposed to vinyl chloride, a chemical widely used in plastics.

Liver damage has been discovered in a small number of workers using the plastic polyvinyl chloride to make floor tiles. Polyvinyl chloride is used in a wide range of products.

The Food and Drug Administration and the EPA recently recalled several dozen aerosol products in which vinyl chloride was used as a propellant.

Dr. Glenn Schweitzer, director of EPA's office of toxic substances, told a special scientific meeting organized in response to the recent discovery of the rare liver cancers. "In the United States substantial amounts of vinyl chloride—probably exceeding 200 million pounds annually—and large quantities of polyvinyl chloride, probably exceeding 50 million pounds, are being discharged into the environment during the polyvinyl chloride production process.

"Most of the vinyl chloride escapes directly into the atmosphere as air emissions, with lesser amounts dissolved in water, effluent streams, and entrapped in sludge and solid wastes. Polyvinyl chloride losses occur as particulates in air emission, suspending solids in water effluents and components of solid wastes," he said.

The risks to the population are unknown, Dr. Schweitzer said. He urged industry to bankroll research on people who live near chemical plants and who are likely to have been exposed to low levels of vinyl chloride for years.

Dr. Schweitzer said EPA recently began nationwide sampling to measure vinyl chloride levels near 10 polyvinyl chloride plants. The results should be available in several weeks.

Dr. Schweitzer also told the meeting, held by the New York Academy of Sciences with the American Cancer Society and other organizations, that a proposed Toxic Substances Control Act has been in a joint congressional committee for two months.

"Thus," he said, "a very powerful tool for addressing the vinyl chloride problem, and similar problems with other chemicals, in an adequate manner, is not available to the federal government."

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Linked to Liver Cancer

Doctors Discuss Vinyl Dangers

NEW YORK (UPI) — A report from West Germany has raised new concern about factory workers who may be exposed to harmful doses of vinyl chloride, the chemical used to make a widely used plastic.

Dr. W.K. Lelbach of the University of Bonn told 300 scientists, industry and labor officials Friday that six persons who make the plastic, called polyvinyl chloride (pvc), into tiles in a German factory have been found to have diseased livers.

Seventeen cases of a rare liver cancer have been discovered among workers who make and process vinyl chloride but there had been no previous indication that the harmful effects also might extend into the many plants that mold and shape pvc into such things as meat wrapping, kitchen ware and vinyl paints.

Among the subjects of today's closing session at the two-day meeting was a report by the Environmental Protection Agency on the threat of vinyl chloride beyond the factories.

Dr. Irving Selikoff, cochairman of the meeting, said the German report was "bad news."

"Until the present we had hoped that the problem of disease associated with vinyl chloride exposure would be limited to the relatively small group of men who were engaged in making vinyl chloride or in its polymerization to pvc," he said in an interview.

"We had hoped that such disease would not be found among people who were taking the pvc and were making products from it. They are a very much larger group. There may be 6,500 vinyl chloride and pvc polymerization workers, but there are probably tens and tens and tens of thousands of workers using it to manufacture secondary products."

Vinyl chloride also has been used as a propellant in some aerosol products and two government agencies recently banned the sale of hair sprays, deodorants, indoor insecticides and other products containing the gas.

Selikoff said not enough research has been conducted yet to know if vinyl chloride is a threat to consumers, but the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health is beginning a two-year survey to see if beauticians who used the hair sprays have had any ill effects.

Cancer hits vinyl chloride fabricators

NEW YORK (AP) — The first indication that vinyl chloride may be a hazard to thousands of industrial workers outside the plastic manufacturing plant itself was reported yesterday.

Six cases of liver disease in workers converting the finished plastic into floor tiles were reported by Dr. W. K. Lelbach and others from the University of Bonn.

The liver disease was marked both by functional impairment and cellular changes that could be precursors of a rare liver cancer, angiosarcoma. 13 cases of which have been found among plastics workers in the United States.

The workers with the invariably fatal liver cancer were involved in the use of vinyl chloride, a colorless gas used as a propellant, and its conversion to polyvinyl chlorides in the manufacturing plant. Some 6,500 American workers are employed at this stage.

Thousands of others are involved in molding, forming, extruding, shaping, coating paper for use in food wrappers and containers, tiles and detergent bottles.

The German doctors' findings were disclosed at a meeting here sponsored by the American Cancer Society, the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

The question of risk to the consumer is unresolved, but the U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission said on May 7 it intended to ban the use of vinyl chloride in most household sprays.

At least five deaths, among workers at the B. F. Goodrich plant in Louisville, Ky., here have been attributed to the rare disease. In addition, two other cases of angiosarcoma have been reported in Louisville: three at the Goodyear plant in Niagara Falls, N.Y.; two at a Union Carbide plant in West Virginia; and one in Pottstown, Pa.

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