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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AKRON, Jan. 23 -- The B.F. Goodrich Company today reported that it informed Kentucky health officials and the Federal National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health that the Company is investigating whether the cancer deaths of three employees in the polyvinyl chloride operations at its Louisville, Ky. plant were related to occupational causes.

Dr. Maurice N. Johnson, the Company's director of environmental health, said he had recently received medical reports concerning the death of an employee late in December. A review of medical records uncovered that two other employees had apparently died from the same cause -- one in September, 1971 and one in March, 1973. The reported causes of death are subject to verification, he added.

"Awareness of this grouping," said Dr. Johnson, "warranted a thorough investigation and prompt notification of the two government agencies most directly concerned."

The B.F. Goodrich Company has been conducting programs to reduce exposures to hydrocarbons, particularly vinyl chloride, throughout its operations. While all plants were operating at levels well below those prescribed by Federal government standards, a successful effort has been made to reduce levels in these plants to approximately one-tenth those specified.

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These efforts have included development of the most sophisticated monitoring systems now known; strict rules on procedures where exposure might be increased; a complete checking of all pipes, valves and similar equipment to prevent leaks, and extensive improvements in ventilation systems.

"The death in December, considered in relation to the two previous similar cases, has caused us to initiate intensive investigations throughout the vinyl products operations of the Company," Dr. Johnson said.

"To be sure we get the best independent evaluation and guidance, the Company has engaged Tabershaw-Cooper Associates, Inc. of Berkeley, Calif. Dr. Irving R. Tabershaw, one of the country's foremost experts in the field of public and occupational health and safety, is supervising the work of this consultant firm," Dr. Johnson said.

The Company has instituted a program of explaining the new information and steps the Company is taking to all employees involved in vinyl products production. In addition, the Company has put into action a program to reduce exposures to vinyl chloride and other hydrocarbons to the minimum possible in all vinyl operations. Operations of the plants are continuing under the program of minimum exposure levels.

"We are providing medical examinations to all employees involved in any phase of vinyl chloride or polyvinyl chloride production and reviewing available medical records of any deceased former or retired employees," Dr. Johnson said.

"We have assured officials of NIOSH and the state of Kentucky that we will continue to provide them with any significant new information as it develops," he said.

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A team of experts from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health of the Center for Disease Control will visit a Louisville, Ky., plant of The B.F. Goodrich Company tomorrow to begin an investigation of health hazards involved in the polymerization of vinyl chloride.

The team will begin its work in response to an alert from the company which reported one case of liver cancer and three cases of angiosarcoma, a rare type of liver cancer, among polymerization workers at the plant.

Dr. Marcus M. Key, director of NIOSH, said the Institute also will step up its effort to determine the extent of the disease in the United States and in foreign countries with similar manufacturing processes.

At a later date, Dr. Key said, NIOSH will transmit criteria for a health standard to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration in the Department of Labor.

Under a 1970 law, NIOSH is responsible for health effects research and criteria used by OSHA to set and enforce standards for protecting health and safety at the workplace.

In the interim, Key added, NIOSH will work with OSHA and the key Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the industry and involved workers to develop stringent work practices for use in the polymerization processes.

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