

Vinyl Chloride Exposure Limit Is Opposed by Plastics Industry

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WASHINGTON, June 25 — Representatives of the plastics industry pressed today for a relaxation of proposed Federal rules governing worker exposure to vinyl chloride, a chemical that has been linked to 21 cases of a rare, fatal liver cancer.

Industry spokesmen said that the proposed standard was medically unnecessary, technologically unfeasible and would lead to the loss of as many as 2.2 million jobs.

At the opening of what is expected to be a long Labor Department hearing on the proposed new standard of no exposure to detectable levels of the widely used chemical, industry spokesmen clashed with representatives of labor and Government and university scientists who testified that even stricter standards than those proposed must be implemented to protect the health of hundreds of thousands of American workers.

The debate today illustrated the difficulties faced by the Labor Department's Occupational Safety and Health Administration in protecting workers in the face of industry opposition. Until the new vinyl chloride standard was proposed last month, the three-year history of Administration action has leaned toward capitulation to industry demands.

Emergency Limit Set

Currently, the industry is operating under an emergency temporary exposure limit of 50 parts of vinyl chloride per million parts of air, a level that has been shown to cause angiosarcoma, a liver cancer, in rats and mice in studies conducted by industry and university scientists.

Although scientists from the National Cancer Institute testified that there was no known safe level of a cancer-causing agent, the Society of the Plastics Industry proposed in prepared testimony an average daily exposure limit of 25 parts per million a maximum momentary exposure of 40 parts per million, for workers exposed to vinyl chloride in the process of transforming it into polyvinyl chloride.

This standard, according to the industry plan, would be gradually reduced to a daily average of 10 parts per million with maximum exposure of 25 parts per million by October, 1976.

Somewhat stricter standards were proposed for workers engaged in the synthesis of vinyl chloride, a sweet-smelling gas. But for those workers who fabricate polyvinyl chloride into any of thousands of consumer and industrial products, the industry said that no vinyl chloride standards should be applied.

Scientists from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health noted, however, that earlier this month two cases of angiosarcoma of the liver were uncovered in employees in fabrication plants in Connecticut.

The plastics industry's position was outlined by Anton Vittone, presiden of the B. F. Goodrich Chemical Company, where the vinyl chloride cancer risk was first uncovered last January. Mr. Vittone, chairman of the industry's committee of vinyl chloride and polyvinyl chloride producers, said in his prepared statement, "The committee is unanimous in its position that the proposed standard is not technologically feasible and, if adopted, would shut down the industry."

Mr. Vittone said, "There is no data showing that exposure levels as provided for under the emergency standards are not safe or of low degree of risk." He noted further that the rats exposed at 50 parts per million got cancer only after a life span equivalent to 80 years in man.

An industry news release stated that later testimony would show that enforcement of the no-exposure standard could result in an over-all loss of 2.2 million jobs.

Labor representatives decried these statements as "black-mail" that ignores "overwhelming medical evidence." Peter Bommarito, president of the United Rubber Workers Union, said that workers' lives were more important than any product.

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