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But Industry Hits New Rules U.S. Bears Down on Gas Exposure for Workers

By ARTHUR H. ROTSTEIN

CHICAGO (AP) — The government announced on Tuesday new safety standards to reduce worker exposure to the cancer-causing gas vinyl chloride.

John H. Stender, assistant Secretary of Labor, said the new Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards won't cause any industry shutdowns. But the industry reacted quickly, denouncing the regulations and filing lawsuits seeking judicial review.

The current allowable level will remain in effect until Jan. 1, 1975, Stender said. Present regulations allow workers handling polymer vinyl chloride to be exposed to up to 50 parts per million in eight hours.

Under the new standards, employers must by Jan. 1 reduce levels to one part per million averaged over any eight-hour period and five parts per million averaged over any period no longer than 15 minutes.

Starting in 1976, the wearing of a respirator will be mandatory for any worker exposed to levels greater than these. Until then, the wearing of respirators will be optional if levels remain below 25 parts per million.

Todd C. Walker, president of the Firestone Plastics Co., a division of the Firestone Tire & Rubber Co., called the standards "economically unrealistic, technically unfeasible, politically motivated and medically ridiculous, comparable to a law aimed at stopping automobile deaths by lowering the speed limit to one mile per hour."

Stender said some of the 7,500 polymer plants in the United States employing some 350,000 workers will have trouble meeting the tightened standards. However, he said there would be provisions to allow a company that can't meet the standards to reduce the output to the lowest practical level, provided workers are given respirators.

"This will not cause the industry to shut down," Stender added.

But Walker charged that "the OSHA standard for vinyl chloride exposure puts the vinyl plastics industry on a collision course with economic disaster. More importantly, it throws two million jobs down the drain, according to an economic impact study made earlier this year by Arthur Little & Co., an industrial consulting firm."

He said his company plans to challenge the standards.

Polyvinyl chloride substances are used in a host of plastics products.

In April, OSHA ordered an emergency lowering from the then-prevailing limit of 500 parts per million, after several deaths from a rare liver cancer were thought to be related to handling the chemical.

Preliminary tests conducted in Northbrook, Ill., later that month showed that test mice developed liver cancer when exposed to concentrations of 50 parts per million of vinyl chloride.

Criminal provisions of the standards include a maximum \$10,000 fine and six months' imprisonment.

The Society of the Plastics Industry Inc. (SPI), which represents more than 90 per cent of vinyl chloride and polyvinyl chloride products, filed suit in New York asking the U.S. Court of Appeals for judicial review. A separate suit was filed by the Hooker Chemical Co. of Stamford, Conn.

In a statement, SPI President Ralph L. Harding said the government "may believe it has adopted a compromise position between organized labor on the one hand and industry on the other, but the result is the standard that does not take into account in a practical way the known medical and technological facts."

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