



INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE

To: Dr. F. C. Dehn

Date: March 12, 1979

From: Roy Stack

Location: 20 North

Subject: VCM

RE: J. F. Smith's Memo

*Copy R. Stack
B. Brown*

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Regarding Joe Smith's memo of 3/1/79 and the attached article, do we have any further information to give him, i.e., any planned epidemiological studies, etc. on this effect?

Roy

Roy Stack

/blh

*See last minute.
studies N.S. & England have shown
higher incidence of Brain Cancer
than VCM is reported. - Memos in
file have similar data to Union Carbide & 5 Brain
tumors. There have been warnings of this type
about some of the animal studies too.
Probably more research to start
on this; especially Epi. Don more
thoroughly*

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MAR 12 1979

SL 081694



INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE

To: B. C. Brennan

Date: March 1, 1979

From: J. F. Smith

Location: New York RSO

Subject: Cancer At Chemical Site

Thought you would be interested in the attached. Please advise if there is anything we are doing or if we are following up on this.

Pantasote had been asking me about this release and it's impact on them.

J. F. Smith
J. F. Smith

Enc.
JFStb

cc: R. D. Hammond - 20S
G. J. ~~Hazarchik~~ - 20N

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5 1979

Cancer strikes at chemical plant

by Bill Curry

HOUSTON — An apparently high incidence of brain cancer among workers at a Union Carbide Corp. petro-chemical plant near here has prompted a federal health investigation to determine which of the plant's hundreds of chemicals might have caused the disease.

Most suspect is vinyl chloride, which has been produced or processed in the Texas City Union Carbide plant for 30 years and has been associated with the type of cancer diagnosed in at least seven workers among 11 who contracted brain cancer since 1962.

In the course of that investigation, The Washington Post has learned, U.S. health investigators obtained evidence of another possible rash of brain cancer at the Texas City plant of another chemical company, Monsanto, where vinyl chloride used to be made.

The investigation began after a Union Carbide employee, a victim of brain cancer related to vinyl chloride, complained in November to the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

In previous health studies, scientists have found indications that vinyl chloride, a basic building block in today's plastic world, was related to a form of brain cancer called glioblastoma multiforme.

But they said that more study was warranted to determine a definite relationship, so the occurrence of glioblastoma multiforme among the Union Carbide workers and the brain cancer among Monsanto employees may confirm that finding or may point to yet another chemical as a cause of the fatal disease.

The current concerns draw attention again to the potentially deadly array of Texas Gulf Coast petrochemical plants that are so vital to the booming Houston-region economy. That concern was heightened by the 1976 Velsicol scandal, in which it was discovered that its Phosvel was causing a debilitating nerve disease among workers.

The Gulf Coast's sweeping collection of highly complex petrochemical plants turns natural gas and petroleum into the essence of everyday life — tin-can linings, auto bumpers, stereo records.

Six of every 10 gallons or pounds of petrochemical products made in the United States are produced here, according to the highly regarded research of the Houston Chamber of Commerce. Petrochemicals here employ 31,000 people, have a production valued last year at perhaps \$2.6 billion and a payroll estimated at a half billion dollars.

Recent years have seen another price to be paid in human flesh as chemical after chemical produced or otherwise used here is tied to cancer or is suspected of causing cancer. Benzene, acrylonitrile, vinyl chloride — all are here

with hundreds of others.

Last year a statewide survey showed Texas to have an unusually high death rate from lung cancer, and incidence attributable to what officials call a virtual epidemic of lung cancer along the Texas Gulf Coast.

And a Port Arthur chemical engineer last August, saying oil and chemical companies have made the region a "cancer capital of the United States," sued 14 companies for \$1.5 million, claiming he contracted leukemia as a result of working in the industry.

Shell Oil has reported that one of its products probably caused cancer among workers years ago when safety controls were not so stringent, and some 30 Shell employees at a Deer Park lubricants facility have complained of numbness and pain in their extremities — a condition called peripheral neuropathy.

Shell and Union Carbide assure that whatever the causes of cancer — the Union Carbide link of vinyl chloride to the dead workers is not yet conclusive — new federal standards for exposure to toxic chemicals mean that, whatever past experiences, today's levels are too low to be harmful.

Indeed, Union Carbide says many of

its workers are exposed to less amounts of chemicals than federal law allows. The company says it meets today's vinyl chloride standards of exposure to workers during an eight-hour day of only one part per million — a concentration of fumes in the surrounding air equal to one drop of vermouth in a martini made from 80 fifths of gin.

The Union Carbide employees stricken with brain cancer generally worked before the implementation of today's stricter standards. The 11 brain cancer victims — all but one are dead — ranged in age from 30 to 66, having worked at the plant from 7 to 31 years.

The seven-year employee worked there in the 1950s, while vinyl chloride was still being manufactured, not just processed from purchased lots into beer and food can linings and industrial coatings.

Union Carbide's plant manager in Texas City, Damon L. Engle, says vinyl chloride accounts for 5 percent of the plant's activity and amounts to hundreds of millions pounds a year. Perhaps 60 employees are regularly exposed to it, he said, and 8,000 to 10,000 workers over the past 3 years have potentially been exposed to the cancer-causing product.