

Questions on PVC meat-wrap film persist, but the answers are coming

If you remember your childhood poems, there's one that dwells on the cumulative impact of "little drops of water, little grains of sand . . ." By this time, producers and users of polyvinyl chloride must feel that the "little drops of water" represented by isolated reports of consumer/worker health hazard are beginning to show signs of developing into the mighty ocean of the same verse.

The danger, of course, is that the health-safety issue could become an emotional one. If it does, it wouldn't be the first time that industry has been put into a restrictive box by regulations stampeded into the lawbooks under the banner of consumer or worker protection, without a full evaluation of the situation. Remember the urgency of the 1971 New York city tax penalizing plastic containers?

It needn't work out that way, though. As noted in our last issue (Feb. MP, p. 18), well-publicized concern about the potential toxicity of PVC—first for liquor bottles, through residual monomer migration; then for meat-wrap film, through thermal degradation in hot-wire cutoff—indicate that it is time for industry to make an all-out effort to help resolve the issue.

PVC film has for years been in wide and unquestioned

use as a supermarket-level meat wrap. But a nation butcher-workmen union's petition to the Occupational Safety & Health Administration, calling for a ban or sharp control on the material in retail packaging operations, resulted directly from a recent (November 1973) article in the *Journal of the American Medical Assn.*, suggesting causal relationship in the fact that three female workers had developed respiratory symptoms after exposure to the fumes developed from plasticized PVC film cut with a hot wire on sealing equipment.

However tenuous the evidence of suspected health hazard may be, such publicity can be harmful to industry growth unless effectively countered. This is particularly so in light of the paucity of historical documentation on the actual health effects of long-term exposure to VCM as many other materials. It's the root of the problem.

Meantime, OSHA has taken no direct action on the union petition to ban PVC film from retail meat-wrap operation. And film manufacturers reiterate that normal workplace controls—including adequate ventilation and maintenance of hot-wire cutoff temperature at manufacturer-recommended levels—are all that's needed to eliminate the "hazard." It should be noted that allegations of health hazard in thermal decomposition of PVC film were investigated by public-health authorities in 1969, again in 1970. In both instances, findings were that there is no problem under proper use conditions. Nor, reportedly, has there ever been a question about the health safety of PVC film in product wrapping, for example. And, going a decade or so further back in time, similar questions, with similar results, were raised about the health safety of thermal decomposition of cellophane and rubber hydrochloride film.

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ICI planning big pvc roof drive?

HYDE group of ICI paints division has prepared for a big growth in the use of pvc sheet for roofing and cladding, following favourable changes in the Building Regulations, by increasing its range.

Three new corrugated profiles have been added to its Sintilon range — now claimed to be the widest of any pvc sheet.

Said John Thompson, building products manager, "Our range of profiles is now capable of meeting the great majority of industries' transparent roofing requirement."

As well as flat sheet, the Sintilon range consists of seven profiles, six of which match leading asbestos, corrugated iron and aluminium shapes, and the seventh which is a special box profile.

The three latest — Monad, Double Six and Major Tile — are designed for low pitched roofs.

Information is available in the first ever Sintilon specifier's manual which in 28 pages gives product data, design information and installation methods, says the firm. For details: circle 131.

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Bamboo breakthrough

TOKYO — Plastics 'bamboo' is to be made by a technique developed by Denki Kagaku Kogyo Co Ltd, together with Maruhachi Kasei Kogyo, by extrusion with a complete, continuously moulded tube-joint combination.

The product, which is claimed to be much stronger than existing plastics tubing and is to be marketed under the name Gunibai Bako, will replace natural bamboo, widely used in agriculture, fish-

ing, architecture and decoration.

Problems have been encountered with the natural version tending to rot or crack.

Moulded from a specially formulated pvc, the new product is claimed to be especially remarkable for its continuous extrusion of joint and tube where the tube between any two joints can be hermetically sealed, giving great buoyancy and good flexural strength.