

At Union Carbide

Checking PVC workers to detect dread disease

John Stender, Assistant Secretary of Labor and head of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), is now considering volumes of evidence supporting and opposing a proposed standard for working with vinyl chloride and polyvinyl chloride (PVC) resins. That standard, allowing for "no detectable levels" of vinyl chloride, is supported by labor and opposed by many industrial and management groups.

Of all the information Stender will have before him, probably the most useful could be the data gathered during four days in June, in a small West Virginia city. There in South Charleston, members of IAM Local 598, officials and employees from Union Carbide Corp., and staff members from the famed Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City worked together searching for answers to the frightening problems posed by working with vinyl chloride.

James Copenhaver, Local 598 rep, reports that Union Carbide and the IAM asked Dr. Irving Selikoff, director of Mount Sinai, to come to South Charleston and screen the more than 400 active workers, former employees and retirees. The check was for liver abnormalities that might lead to angiosarcoma, a deadly cancer of the liver.

Angiosarcoma has already claimed the lives of 21 PVC workers around the world. Two of the victims

were 18-year veterans of PVC work at South Charleston. Carbide has been making PVC at the West Virginia plant since 1935, longer than any other plant in the USA.

The product produced by IAM members at South Charleston is Dynel. It's a synthetic fiber that is used widely in the manufacture of wigs, sleepwear and upholstery. Copenhaver adds that even before the current controversy began late last year, Union Carbide pressed for exposure levels of close to 50 parts of vinyl chloride per million parts of air. At the same time, some of the industry was loosely adhering to a 500 parts per million level.

The Mount Sinai tests averaged two and one-half hours. Workers had their chests, hands and feet x-rayed. Other tests included pulmonary functions, urinalysis and blood samples. The examinations were given on company time. If a worker was detained past quitting time, Carbide paid him time and one-half.

Dr. William Nicholson, associate professor at Mount Sinai, reports that the tests are almost all completed in the laboratories. Those results will be given to each worker and will remain confidential unless the worker approves the release. Copies of the overall findings will be sent to OSHA in time to help John Stender decide on the standard that will protect vinyl chloride workers in this country.

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Scheduling—R bert Boggess, vice president of IAM Local 598, discusses the day's schedule with Herman Jarrett, a local IAM volunteer.

PVC consumer products numerous, FDA checking all, banning some

Polyvinyl chloride resins are used in a wide range of consumer products. With two notable exceptions, most of the products containing PVC, are thought not to be harmful to consumers.

One of the recently publicized exceptions is a wide variety of aerosol products, such as hair and wig spray, insect sprays, foot deodorants and sprays, anti-perspirants and deodorant sprays, first-aid sprays, and some medicated vaporizers. The Food and Drug Administration explains that the actual products do not contain PVC. The aerosol mechanism of the can uses vinyl chloride gas as a propellant. It's the propellant that's dangerous to breathe.

In another case, plastic liquor bottles containing polyvinyl chloride have been ordered off the shelves. The FDA found that the PVC combined with the alcohol. Lab studies showed as much as 20 parts per million of PVC combined with the liquor and was subsequently taken in by the consumer.

Studies are continuing by the FDA, the Environmental Protection Agency and other medical groups into possible PVC hazards in other consumer goods. Here are some of the products that use polyvinyl chloride:

Shower curtains	Dentures
Tablecloths	Garden hoses
Construction pipe	Credit cards
Electrical conduits	Foamed carpet padding
Vinyl wall coverings	Weather stripping
Gaskets	Stationery (sheet separators)
Vinyl asbestos flooring	Fruit, vegetable can linings
Steel beer cans (inside lining)	Latex paints and lacquers
Metal screw-on jar lids	Vinyl house siding
Swimming pool liners	(especially mobile homes)
Phonograph records	Inflatable beach balls
Shoes soles and heels	Vinyl auto tops
Auto seat covers	Auto head and arm rests
Bicycle saddles	Food wrappers (meat, cheese,
Salad dressing, detergent bottles	crackers)
Upholstery (coated fabric)	Baby bottles

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