

U.S. report blames airborne lead

A federal study at Globe Union's Bennington, Vt., battery plant has found that 30% of the facility's production workers have abnormally high lead levels in their blood and blamed it on exposure to airborne lead.

Philip Landrigan, a researcher with the federal Center for Disease Control (Atlanta), conducted the study at the request of the Vermont Health Dept. after numerous workers at the plant complained of illness (*CW*, May 24, p. 14). He found that 30% of the workers had blood lead levels between 60 and 80 micrograms/100 milliliters of blood, "levels that have been associated with hematologic and neurologic damage." Landrigan said some of the symptoms the workers reported—such as nervous and mental disorders, stomach cramps and nausea—are related to their lead exposure and that others "would be caused by stress factors."

Vermont's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (VOSHA) has issued numerous citations to the Bennington plant for the presence of airborne lead concentrations in excess of recommended standards. Globe Union has taken steps to correct the problems, but Landrigan says, "We know the lead exposure is [still] excessive in the plant." The researcher explained that the high lead levels in workers' blood "occurred in the parts of the plant with the high lead levels. The principal cause is the exposure to high concentrations of lead in the air."

Landrigan, who submitted his report to VOSHA and to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, is recommending that Globe Union employ "the appropriate engineering and housekeeping controls" to reduce airborne lead levels.

Commenting on Landrigan's study, Globe Union said, "The most important finding in the report is that the symptoms being reported by employees do not appear to be related to blood lead levels." Landrigan says this conclusion represents a "difference in interpretation," and his remarks were "taken out of context."

Other data collected by the CDC researcher showed that blood lead levels among children of the Globe Union workers is lower now than it was in 1976, which Landrigan says is because the firm has installed showers and required workers to change clothes before leaving the plant.

Meanwhile, plant employees have retained former Vermont Governor Thomas Salmon to represent them in negotiations over a growing list of grievances, including

a demand for the resignation of a company physician. The company says that action is "one more obstacle to the future existence of Globe Union in Bennington." Local union officials also object to what they call the "yo-yo system," whereby they say, employees found to have high lead levels while working in "lead" areas are moved to lead-free areas (separated by yellow lines on the floor) and replaced by new employees until the latter ingest enough lead and must also be moved.

Bailing out of Bayport

Plagued by delays and discouraged by the threat of lengthy litigation, BFGoodrich is investigating plant sites in Louisiana as alternatives to Bayport, Tex., for its proposed chlorine-caustic joint venture with Bechtel.

Following extended hearings in which the company's plans were vigorously opposed by citizens' groups concerned about the plant's impact on property values and the environment of Galveston Bay (*CW*, Mar. 8, p. 15), the firm has been issued necessary construction permits by the Texas Air Control Board, and an appeal to have them rescinded has been denied. But Goodrich says the company is concerned that court proceedings may be instituted, further delaying the project, and adds that "time is of the essence."

As a consequence, says Goodrich's Chemical Division, alternative plant sites are being investigated as a matter of "prudent business judgment."

The proposed venture—H.C.C. Chemical Co.—is designed to produce 800 tons/day of chlorine, 800 million lbs./year of ethylene dichloride and 880 tons/day of caustic soda. Groundbreaking was scheduled for mid-1978, with startup planned for early 1980.

Since the project is already six months behind schedule, company personnel have been scouting sites in Ascension, Iverville and St. James parishes, bordering the Mississippi River near Baton Rouge, La.

Headache for Hoechst: Behind Goodrich's apprehension is a suit filed by the Galveston Bay Conservation and Preservation Assn. (GBCPA) in Travis County District Court late last month. It seeks to halt a proposed American Hoechst petrochemical complex on a neighboring site. The group had contested the issuance of permits to both companies, and Clark Thompson, attorney for GBCPA, says a similar suit against the H.C.C. project will

be filed "this week or next."

The American Hoechst case is scheduled to be heard in August, but Thompson has filed for a continuance in an effort to consolidate the two cases. "We will be interpreting a lot of the Texas Clean Air Act," he says, "and we would rather just do it once." For its part, American Hoechst has vowed to continue construction of its \$160-million plant to produce 900 million lbs./year of styrene monomer and 200 million lbs./year of high-density polyethylene, "irrespective of pending litigation." And for its part, Thompson says, GBCPA will "appeal and carry it all the way until we run out of courts."

GBCPA's main argument is that the plants are sited on a section of Bayport Industrial Park the group claims should not be used for heavy manufacturing.

Pesticide plan shelved

The California agriculture industry is breathing a sigh of relief now that the state legislature has waived a regulation requiring farmers to file an environmental impact statement (EIS) every time a pesticide is applied to crops.

Just barely meeting a deadline when California's new pesticide regulations were to go into effect, the legislature passed a bill that temporarily shelved the EIS rule. A state attorney general two years ago said the California Environmental Quality Act required an EIS to cover each use of a pesticide. Since then, a temporary moratorium had relieved farmers of that obligation while the state Dept. of Food and Agriculture worked on a plan to implement the requirement. But now the legislature, which refused to grant farmers a *carte blanche* exemption from the act, has extended the moratorium until 1980 because a satisfactory solution could not be reached by the July 1 deadline.

The compromise measure had the support of the Western Chemicals Assn. and Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr., who said it is an "appropriate balance" between agricultural and environmental interests.

Commenting on the issue, Assemblyman Vic Fazio (D., Sacramento), who introduced the bill, said: "To require farmers to prepare full-blown EISs would simply force on them mounds of paperwork they have neither the expertise to handle, the money to afford, nor the time to prepare. Farmers must often act within hours of discovering a pest threatening their crops; their fields would be devastated by the time the lengthy EIS process is completed."