

Chemical-Air Stirs Health Problems, Chief Says

By ROBIN TONER
Of The Daily Mail Staff

State Health Director George Pickett says he believes chemical pollution in the Kanawha Valley presents the potential for serious health problems for the valley's residents.

"There's no doubt in my mind that the people in the Kanawha Valley are sitting on top of a number of dangerous situations, most of which nobody really knows enough about at this stage of the game," Pickett said in an interview yesterday.

"I'm quite certain that we have the makings of a kepone type disaster in the Kanawha River Valley," he said of an incident in Virginia where a toxic chemical manufactured by Allied Chemical caused a number of health problems for workers, and was discharged into the James River.

"Whether it will ever be known that it's occurred, because it may unfold over a longer, slower period of time and manifest itself in different ways, I really can't say," said Pickett, also a member of the state Air Pollution Control Commission. "But I don't have any doubts but that the same potential exists right here."

"People I talk to indicate that there are uncounted, unfindable outlet valves coming out of the plants along the river, that come in under the Kanawha River, discharging godawful stuff," Pickett said. "They don't even know where they all are, can't find them."

In recent months the issue of chemical plant emissions here has taken on a new intensity. A Health Department statistician currently is conducting a study of mortality rates in the Kanawha Valley.

A panel — for which the study is being done — has been formed by Pickett to prepare data for two upcoming sessions on pollution problems in the valley. Among those involved are APCC Director Carl Beard, State Medical Examiner Irvin Sopher and Kanawha-Charleston Health Department Director Page Seekford.

The APCC will hold a hearing June 1 in the House of Delegates Chamber on the effects of chemical plant emissions in the Kanawha Valley. Meanwhile, the National Science Foundation is funding a two-day conference, to be held June 1 and 2 at West Virginia State, on occupational and environmental health in the Kanawha Valley.

"The point of all this from the point of view of the APCC is whether or not there is enough evidence to indicate that there is

an area that needs to be brought under the area of control of the APCC," Pickett said.

"My hope is that [the hearings] will shed more light than confusion," he added. "I don't know how much of a chance I'd give that."

The health director says he's not sure what the ultimate result of the studies and hearings will be. "It may lead to the APCC looking into the regulatory aspects of chemical plant emissions. It may simply lead to more focused research on our part."

Pickett said he himself is not sure whether there is a need for stricter regulation of chemical plant emissions here. "I honestly don't know," he said. "My guess is yes, just from living here and smelling the air... but I've not yet seen the engineering data."

With the series of health problems that have cropped up in recent years at chemical plants, has Pickett considered expanding his industrial health department?

"There's no support for it," the health director said. "In fact, our department has been cut this year. I don't think there's any support anywhere in state government to expand that kind of thing."

(Turn to Pg. 2A, Col. 2)



GEORGE PICKETT
Health Director

UCC 100237

THE WEATHER

CLEAR TONIGHT, Lows mid 40s (7C). Mostly sunny Wednesday. Highs upper 60s (21C).

Details on Page 3A

Charleston Daily Mail

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CHARLESTON, WEST VIRGINIA; TUESDAY EVENING, MAY 15, 1979

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VOLUME 172, NO. 116



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"Con-
irrational rules
and process
detract from or
thwart the in-
ons of Congress... and
certainly do not promote the goal of
energy self-sufficiency," said Byrd.

At least nine programs administered
by seven agencies "act as a dead hand
on the coal industry's efforts to expand
production, as the President requested
many months ago," the majority leader
said.

He cited Interior Department regula-
tions which have delayed for 14 months
the opening of a major underground
mine near Pigeon Creek, Mingo County.
Although the mine would produce 3.5
million tons of coal a year — one-half
of 1 percent of the country's total pro-
duction — it has been unable to open
because the Interior Department has
refused on environmental grounds to
issue a permit for a railroad siding to
serve the facility.

Byrd said there is "an advancing
awareness" within the Senate that un-
necessary government regulations are
preventing a nationwide switch to coal.

He blamed the regulations on "over
zealousness on the part of those in the
bureaucracy" who write the rules.
Many of these people "have never been

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Pickett mused: "They see that in the
present frame of sort of an anti-bureau-
cratic, anti-regulatory process. . . . He
added that attitude can be seen strongly
towards the APCC."

"Because [the APCC] has done a bet-
ter job than most Air Pollution Control
Commissions around the United States,
they seem to feel that Carl Beard is a
villain. I think he ought to be canonized
for what he's done, particularly for the
Kanawha River Valley."

Pickett added, "They've allowed the
big power companies to make it seem
that Carl Beard is singularly responsi-
ble for raising the cost of energy. . . . The
whole mood is anti-regulation."

The health director also noted that
often by the time the results of occupa-
tionally-related health problems can be
seen, their cause has been corrected.

"Secondly, it's not possible as far as I
know to have a riskless world. . . . The
question is what degree of risks can we
tolerate or accept as individuals in so-
ciety."

"Thirdly," the health director said,
"to what extent are the people in the
community sensitized to the issue? [In
the Kanawha Valley] everybody com-
plains about it, but one does not detect
the feeling that the community is say-
ing, 'hey, I want this stopped.'"

Pickett added that when he discussed
potential health problems on a recent
televized news program, a number of
industry representatives called his and
the governor's office to comment. "As
far as I know, there were no cards, no
letters, no phone calls received by me
or anyone on the governor's staff say-
ing we're glad the state is taking that
interest and that position."

The health director continued, "I
don't need fan mail. . . but these little
things register in your mind."

Pickett reflected that much of the
problem may be created by the fact

with information about pollution and its
risks, but not with realistic solutions.

"You have to show people that you
can solve the problem, [that] it isn't just
die or shut down the economy of the
river. There are steps that can be tak-
en. It is possible to clean up a town and
not lose its economy. It's been done.
Pittsburgh showed that."

"I'm not inherently a crusader," the
health director reflected. "I can lay out
the facts and issues and choices that
people have. . . I can try to bring to
their attention the choices. . . but ulti-
mately, the more power I have to do
something about it, the less inclined I
am to use that power unless the peop le
want it used."

FUEL PLAN

Continued From Page One

Committee has oversight over the
Clean Air Act, said he hopes to get EPA
and utility officials together in his of-
fice to try to resolve the dispute.

"There has to be a yielding, an oppor-
tunity to modify things," said Randolph.
"I want to have them sit down together.
They've been too much at arm's
length."

The 720-megawatt Eddie Stone facili-
ty south of Philadelphia is emitting into

ville to both Atlanta and New York. The
study says that if United withdraws
from Charleston, Piedmont is most
likely to replace service to those cities.

● concentrate as many passengers as
possible in Charleston at key times of

leaving or developing Charleston as
the center of the state's connections to
other major cities. Consultants said
they think that might improve service
in other West Virginia cities, but
Cowgill said the leaders of other com-

ing the first three months, before the
United strike began to take effect. He
said the 12 percent growth over last
year was significantly higher than the
annual 4 1/2 percent growth at the air-
port over the past ten years.

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