

BIO-MEDICAL RESEARCH
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A 16 Monday, May 20, 1974 THE WASHINGTON POST

Vinyl Chloride Linked to Cancer**Chemical Hazard Kept Quiet**By Morton Mintz
Washington Post Staff Writer

For at least a year, chemical firms in the United States and Europe withheld significant scientific findings linking liver cancer to gas used to make one of the commonest plastics, the American Chemical Society's weekly news magazine reports today.

The gas is vinyl chloride, used to make the plastic polyvinyl chloride.

The trade association of the American chemical industry, the Manufacturing Chemists Association, joined in holding the findings in confidence. Chemical and Engineering News reports in its May 20 issue.

The Italian scientist who made the findings said that although preliminary, they were "predictive" of the fatal cancers recently recognized in several workers employed in converting the gas into polyvinyl chloride.

The scientist is Prof. Cesare Maltoni, director of the Istituto di Oncologia in Bologna. In a study initiated in September, 1971, by one of the European firms, Montedison, he discovered a rare form of cancer, angiosarcoma, in the liv-

ers of rats breathing vinyl chloride in a ratio of 250 parts per million (ppm).

That was in August, 1972. At that time, the permissible level for workers allowed by the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) was 500 ppm, or twice as much.

In January, 1973, five months after Maltoni found the first rat angiosarcoma, a team of three U.S. chemical industry scientists visited him in Bologna to learn about his work.

The visit was preceded by months of negotiations with the European firms in addition to Montedison that had joined in sponsoring his studies: Imperial Chemical Industries, Solvay and Rhone-Progil.

But "U.S. chemical industry sources say they were bound by an agreement under which [the] four European firms controlled any release of animal test data obtained by Prof. Maltoni," Chemical and Engineering News says. It did not name any of the American firms.

A key second experiment at levels of 200, 100, and 100 ppm began about July 8, 1973, when

Maltoni observed that tumors were continuing to occur in rats at 250 ppm, the trade magazine says.

The first public disclosure of his findings came on Feb. 13, 1974. This was 24 days after H.F. Goodrich Co. announced that since 1971 three workers at its polyvinyl plant in Louisville had died of angiosarcoma of the liver.

Since then, the total of confirmed victims of angiosarcoma at the Goodrich facility and at other polyvinyl chloride plants in the United States has increased to 13 and in other countries to six. Two of the American workers survive. All of the others have died.

On April 3, OSHA announced an emergency rule drastically lowering the permissible concentration of vinyl chloride from 500 ppm to 50 ppm. Workers engaged in manufacturing vinyl chloride and polyvinyl chloride number 6,500 in the United States and 20,000 elsewhere.

Even the 50 ppm level may be hazardous, Maltoni told a meeting of the New York Academy of Sciences and the American Cancer Society on

May 10. He disclosed that in rats he had found one liver angiosarcoma at only 50 ppm, along with other types of tumors.

For some nine months, a House-Senate conference committee has had a bill before it that would require manufacturers to test new chemicals under rules laid down by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The stalled legislation is the proposed toxic substances control bill. Senate conferees have been waiting for Rep. Harley O. Staggers (D-W. Va.), chairman of the House conferees, to announce his readiness to meet Senate sources any.

The House bill would require pre-production testing of only those new chemicals that are listed as potentially dangerous, with results to be reported to the EPA 90 days before production is to begin.

The stronger Senate version would require in addition that companies notify the agency of all new chemicals considered for production, so that the EPA could order testing of chemicals that are not on the list but that may be suspect

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T.R. J. or Kelson