

Study of Vinyl Chloride

EPA Cancer Data Being Withheld

From The Dispatches

HOUSTON, Oct. 27—Data from a study of the concentration here of a potentially cancer-causing chemical is being withheld because of possible criminal prosecution, according to federal officials.

As part of an Environmental Protection Agency study of vinyl chloride, air samples are being collected near chemical plants along the Houston Ship Channel to determine the concentration of the chemical in the atmosphere.

An EPA lawyer in the agency's Dallas regional office said Friday that the results of the Houston study would be withheld because the study

"represents the investigation files of a law enforcement agency" and polluters releasing the gas could be subject to prosecution.

At least 12 deaths in the United States and elsewhere have been linked to vinyl chloride gas. It is suspected as a cause of a form of liver cancer, angiosarcoma.

The EPA attorney, Jim Collins, said the information was being withheld at the instruction of George Marcellino, of EPA headquarters in Washington.

The information would be released only after evaluation and possible legal disposition, Collins said.

The EPA vinyl chloride

team is testing for the chemical at 10 plants around the country, including those in Houston. Dr. Glenn E. Schweitzer, head of the EPA team, said an estimated 200 million pounds of the gas escapes annually into the atmosphere in the United States.

Meanwhile, in Alcoa, the president of B.F. Goodrich's Chemicals Division raised the spectre of massive job losses in a critique of the proposed new Occupational Safety and Health Administration standards for worker exposure to vinyl chloride.

"The proposed standard of no detectable level of exposure does not appear to be possible with the current state

of technology," Anton Vittone said. "And, if imposed, could displace not only the 6,500 vinyl chloride monomer and polyvinyl chloride production workers, but also hundreds of thousands of other employees in the companies which use PVC."

Vittone said about 100 scientists and others are working six to seven days a week in a multimillion-dollar effort to reduce employee exposure to vinyl chloride.

Five of the reported vinyl chloride deaths were among former employees of Goodrich plant in Louisville. Two cases were reported among living employees there.