

Briefed on research

Chemical firms knew of cancer link in '73

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Several chemical firms, including the B. F. Goodrich Co., knew of preliminary but significant data linking exposure to vinyl-chloride gas to a rare liver cancer, but the information was not made public for more than a year.

While acknowledging that the controversial scientific information hinting at a link between the chemical and cancer was discussed at a meeting of industry representatives on Jan. 30, 1973, a spokesman for the Manufacturing Chemists Association (MCA) said the European firms that provided the information insisted that it be kept confidential.

And a spokesman for Goodrich would acknowledge only that a representative of the company attended "one or more meetings" at which the scientific findings were discussed.

Earlier this month the president of the Goodrich chemical division, Anton Vitone, said the first he knew of a study establishing an apparent link between exposure to the chemical and the liver cancer, angiosarcoma was in February of this year, when an Italian who did the research testified in Washington. And Vitone said he never heard the word "angiosarcoma" until December of last year.

Death of 3 announced here

In January, Goodrich announced that three of its Louisville employees had died of angiosarcoma after years of exposure to vinyl chloride, and that some of its employees here were showing liver abnormalities on medical tests. Nearly a month later the work of the Italian researcher, Dr. Cesare Maltoni of Bologna, was reported publicly by the MCA.

However, notes of the Jan. 30, 1973, meeting show that William E. McCormick, manager of environmental controls for Goodrich, represented the chemical division at the MCA meeting.

(McCormick retired "a year to 18 months ago," according to the Goodrich spokesman. He could not be located for

comment and the Goodrich spokesman said he did not know what, if any, actions had been taken within the company as a result of any reports McCormick might have made on the confidential MCA meeting.)

The MCA spokesman said today that the Jan. 30 meeting apparently was the first at which chemical firms in this country learned of the European research into a possible liver cancer produced by exposure to vinyl chloride. He also claimed that the European research was reported as being of "high quality" and comparable to scientific research work done in American laboratories.

Asked about this point today, the public-relations spokesman for Goodrich again stressed the firm's position that in early 1973, the Maltoni research was "not complete" and the researcher's findings were "inconclusive." He said he was not aware that the president of the chemical division of his firm had said he was unaware of Maltoni's work until this year.

The public-relations man at MCA said there had been "great reluctance" by European firms to share their scientific data until they were guaranteed it would be kept in confidence.

He said the MCA committee agreed to keep the data under wraps Dec. 20 and the Jan. 30 meeting was then scheduled. The European firms were identified as Montedison, which initiated the Maltoni study; Imperial Chemical Industries; Solvay and Rhone-Progil. At least one of those firms, Imperial Chemical, has since reported that at least one of its workers died of angiosarcoma.

MCA is now preparing a timetable of the sequence of events leading up to the association's final public announcement of the European research this February. It expects to issue this information later this week.

Meanwhile, a spokesman for the National Industrial Institute for Occupational Safety (NIOSH) said the federal agency is still trying to determine who within

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The Institute was told last summer by Dr. National of the researcher's findings. At Goodrich, earlier testimony by V.K. Jones, the head of the firm's Cleveland, Ohio, based chemical division, indicated that a possible medical problem with vinyl chloride may have been suspected in 1964, when several Louisville workers began having a rare hand disease, but this was later cleared up after cleaning procedures were changed.

Then, in May 1970, Dr. V. L. Viola of Home, Ind., began reporting tumors in rats exposed to vinyl chloride, and an industry committee put together by NCA "learned of similar animal research which had been initiated by some European manufacturers some time after Dr. Viola's report," according to V.K. Jones. This was apparently a reference to

Dr. Nathou's work, but he was not identified by name in V.K. Jones' testimony at a hearing in Washington this year on the vinyl-chloride problem.

Then, V.K. Jones noted, the NCA began an initial test last September and in December resumed liver tests in September after its Louisville plant physicians detected liver problems among workers in late spring. Those tests were completed in December and, together with the uncovering of the deaths from angiosarcoma, led to the January announcement by Goodrich that kicked off the public controversy about vinyl chloride.

Exposure to vinyl chloride, a key chemical to much of the plastics industry, has now been linked with the deaths of 13 American chemical workers and six work-

2 groups differ on availability of knowledge about vinyl dangers

By DENNIS POLITE

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The Manufacturing Chemists Association (MCA) and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) are at odds over the question of who knew what—and when—in the vinyl chloride case.

The chemists over the weekend issued a press release detailing the sequence of events in which the association said it discovered that worker exposure to vinyl chloride could cause the rare liver cancer, angiosarcoma.

The release says the chemists association went to NIOSH on July 17, 1973, and told the federal agency that studies in Italy had shown that animals exposed to the chemical developed cancerous tumors.

Dr. Marcus M. Key, director of NIOSH, denies from Washington in a telephone interview that NIOSH received such information from the chemists association at that time. In fact, Key says in a statement issued after the chemists' release, the chemical industry did not even mention the Italian studies.

Was known for 18 months

This dispute is the latest development in the wake of disclosures that the American chemical industry knew at least 18 months ago that exposure to vinyl chloride could cause angiosarcoma, but did not make public the information at that time.

The chemists association says it was bound by an agreement with the European chemical companies with which it was cooperating to keep one Italian research project secret.

The danger of exposure to vinyl chloride finally became publicly known about five months ago when the B. F. Goodrich Co. announced that some of its workers at its Bells Lane plant in Louisville died of angiosarcoma, probably caused by exposure to vinyl chloride.

The company, in subsequent announcements, said five workers' deaths had been attributed to angiosarcoma. Two living workers also have the cancer.

Other deaths from vinyl-chloride-related angiosarcoma have since been discovered both in America and in Europe.

Government standards have been revised in regard to the allowable amount of exposure of the chemical to workers, and the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is now proposing that no exposure be allowed in plants which produce the chemical.

Officials tell of suspicion

Goodrich officials said it was the suspicion of their company physician that led them to investigate the high incidence of liver abnormalities among its workers. This investigation, the company says, led to the subsequent discovery of the angiosarcoma cases.

However, The Louisville Times reported that the company had been aware of the Italian studies.

list, Dr. Cesare Maltoni, who had done the animal studies, said he told the chemists' association — which includes Goodrich — as much as 18 months ago that the exposure to vinyl chloride caused cancer.

Maltoni also said he told NIOSH officials about six months after that. Key said NIOSH was not told at that time.

The chemists' release says, "While it has been recognized for decades that exposure to high concentrations of vinyl chloride monomer might cause liver and kidney injuries, the U. S. chemical industry was not aware of any cancer-related potential of vinyl chloride monomer until May 1970."

Says it briefed its members

After it learned from Maltoni in January 1973 of his studies, the association says, it briefed its members on the results. It also had kept them informed of earlier, less reliable, studies.

And in July of last year, the chemists association says, it went to NIOSH and also briefed the federal officials on the Italian studies.

Key's statement says, "On July 17, 1973, I and several members of my staff met at MCA's request. MCA informed NIOSH of an MCA research study involving exposure of several rodent species to vinyl chloride vapors at 50, 500 and 5,000 parts per million parts of air. NIOSH asked MCA to keep (it) advised of the study's progress."

Key's statement says, "At this meeting there was no mention of angiosarcoma of the liver in humans or animals; no reference to production of liver tumors in animals by an Italian investigator."

Says it heard only in January

NIOSH says the next it heard of vinyl chloride was the January disclosure by Goodrich. The day of the Goodrich announcement, NIOSH says, is the first time

that the chemists association mentioned the Maltoni study.

NIOSH says it began to ask for information about vinyl chloride in January 1973 when it published in the Federal Register a list of 23 chemical substances and physical agents which it considered as potential hazards. Vinyl chloride was among these, NIOSH says.

The chemists' association chronology says it was told in 1970, 1971 and in 1972 of studies involving vinyl chloride and animals. It considered some of the studies less than reliable, it says, and undertook to do its own studies.

But in July, 1971, the association's chart shows, it wrote to all member companies' medical departments and alerted them to the possible "health problems" with vinyl chloride. At the same time, it asked for support for a study into the effects of vinyl-chloride exposure.

Provide financial support

The chemists' chronology suggests that despite earlier statements by Goodrich officials little was known about the effects of vinyl chloride, much was being done by the chemists association to confirm the Italian studies. And member companies were involved in most of these efforts through their financial support.

The chronology also shows that at least six months before the Goodrich announcement of the deaths, death records and personnel records of employees were being assembled by a consulting firm hired by the chemists to determine the causes of death.

(Despite this check and another by the company, however, it was The Times that uncovered the fifth Goodrich death when it obtained the man's death certificate from his family.)

The chemists' association says it now has four studies under way to study the effects of vinyl-chloride exposure on animals.

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