

New Evidence Links Vinyl Chloride To High Liver Cancer Death Rates

WASHINGTON (AP) — A medical study has produced new evidence suggesting a high incidence of death from a rare liver cancer among factory employees working with vinyl chloride, a chemical widely used in the plastics industry.

A study of vinyl chloride workers at the Goodyear plant in Niagara Falls, N.Y., found that three of 24 deaths were due to the cancer, angiosarcoma.

Dr. Irving J. Selikoff, director of the Environmental Sciences Laboratory of the Mount Sinai School of Medicine, cited the study. He emphasized the critical importance of reducing the amount of vinyl chloride workers are exposed to, to a "no detectable level" as proposed by the Labor Department.

Selikoff was among dozens of witnesses Tuesday at a hearing on the Labor Department's proposed standards for regulating vinyl chloride use.

Representatives of the Society of the Plastics Industry, Inc., a trade association, argued that the medical evidence was too inconclusive to require banning worker exposure to the chemical. They said the proposed regulations were impossible to achieve and would

force the industry to close scores of plants with the loss of as many as 2.2 million jobs.

"The proposed permanent standard is not technologically feasible and, if adopted, would shut down the industry," warned Anton Vittone, president of the B. F. Goodrich Chemical Co.

Vittone, representing the plastic industry trade association, proposed a different standard in prepared testimony. His proposal would reduce worker exposure to vinyl chloride from 50 parts per million of air now in force to 10 parts per million, effective October 1977.

But Selikoff argued that "the only prudent course for the prevention of angiosarcoma ... is to provide a work environment with no detectable levels of vinyl chloride."

Dr. Marcus M. Key, director of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, said the finding of 19 cases of angiosarcoma — 13 of them in the United States — among vinyl chloride workers between January and May "indicates that we are observing a newly recognized occupational disease associated with exposure" to vinyl chloride.

He said that previously about

20 to 30 cases of the disease had been reported annually in the United States.

Key also disclosed that within the past two weeks scientists have documented two more liver cancer deaths in men employed at plants using polyvinyl chloride to fabricate other products.

Vinyl chloride, a gas, is used to produce polyvinyl chloride, a white sugary-like material used in the manufacture of most plastics.

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