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Unions call for zero VCM exposure levels

A STRONG call for much stricter standards in vinyl chloride emissions than even the latest US regulations came from the three-day conference called in Geneva by the International Federation of Chemical and General Workers' Unions. Summing up the mood of the conference, ICF general secretary Charles Levinson said: "In this area we can no longer rely on past procedures and we can no longer wait for the problem to show itself once cases have appeared—which with PVC can be 20 or 30 years."

It was no longer a question of numerical exposure levels, even 1 ppm, said Levinson. If dangerous exposure could not be prevented the process concerned could not be maintained.

The meeting of 142 delegates from 16 countries—including the US, UK, France, West Germany, Holland, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland and Japan—was described as the first time that organized labour and top medical men have got together and agreed a top-priority programme of close co-operation for eliminating industrial hazards.

The 25 doctors present included Cesare Maltoni, whose earlier work first provided the link between vinyl chloride and angiosarcoma. Maltoni gave details of his latest findings, namely that rats exposed to varying concentrations of VCM from 10 000 ppm down to 50 ppm for four hours daily, five days a week, for 12 months, had developed lung, brain and breast cancer.

As an example of what workers wanted from PVC plants, Herbert Wiesner (Industrie Gewerkschaft, Chemie, Papier, Keramik of West Germany) said that unions would be seeking a zero standard for VCM emissions. In closed circuits, joints and nozzles must always be changed preventively

before leaks occurred and autoclaves should be cleaned automatically—by robots, for example—or chemically rather than by human beings.

David Warburton, the national industrial officer of the UK's largest chemical industry union, the General and Municipal Workers' Union, in a statement after the conference lent his weight to the zero exposure demand.

"I must make it clear," he said, "that we are not prepared to adopt a flexible approach on this issue when lives are put at risk. The new US standard of 1 ppm which apparently worries UK manufacturers is not acceptable either to the US unions or ourselves. Nor are we prepared to negotiate or bargain on exposure levels."

"It is no longer sufficient for UK manufacturers to relate their monitoring to exposures of even 1 ppm when equipment is now available to measure one part per billion."

The GMW can now be expected to press for its view forcefully when the new UK code of practice is drawn up for adoption by the end of this year. ● With the adoption by the US Food and Drugs Administration of tough new provisional standards for the use of PVC packaging for food and drink, a number of US companies must now be re-examining their rôle in this admittedly small market. The FDA has stipulated that PVC used in foods must not contain more than 10 ppm of monomer, of which not more than 50 parts per thousand million must be extracted into the packaged product. A permanent standard has not yet been determined.

In Europe, Norsk Hydro, which is poised to lead off with a big VCM-PVC expansion, is understood to have given up any hope of ever using PVC in food and beverage applications.

CIA appeals for UK price help

THE UK's Chemical Industries Association (CIA) has again appealed to the Department of Prices and Consumer Protection for major changes in the Prices Legislation.

The CIA communiqué states that "the attractive export prices of the first half of 1974 no longer apply and the industry can no longer expect to gain the majority of cash flow from exports."

"If the proposed major chemical industry investment programme is to be carried through, major changes in price legislation and taxation rules will be needed. These should include all those

proposals recently identified by the Confederation of British Industry but, if they are to meet the chemical industry's specific problems, they will have to go beyond such proposals.

"In particular, allowable costs and profits need to take fully into account replacement costs of plant: appropriate adjustments need to be made to the depressed reference levels applying to most companies in the chemical industry; and a very generous allowance is needed for unfructified investment in the calculation of allowable price and profit levels," maintains the CIA appeal.

USSR starts big new ammonia unit

THE first 450 000 ton/year stage of the Novomoskovsk, USSR, ammonia plant has been commissioned, right on schedule, but in splendid isolation.

The on-time commissioning has created down-stream problems. Major ammonium nitrate and nitric acid plants linked to the ammonia plant are still far from complete, held up by construction and equipment delays.

For inexplicable reasons, the ammonium nitrate and nitric acid units were placed in a "secondary product" category and, as such, failed to receive priority treatment. Ammonia from the new unit must now be stored or shipped long distances to other fertilizer complexes in the USSR, reports Pravda.

Algeria commissions new sulphuric acid unit

SOC. Nationale de Siderurgie has commissioned its new 270 ton/day sulphuric acid plant at Ghazaouet, Algeria. The plant forms part of the facilities for the production of 40 000 ton/year of metallic zinc.

Sulphur dioxide-containing gases from a zinc concentrates roaster provide feedstock for the plant, built by Chemico. Chemico technology was used and the company also constructed 20 000 ton storage facilities for the acid produced.

Construction of the plant was completed in 1972 but start-up was delayed until September 1974 while other construction work at the site was completed.

Since commissioning, the plant has run at up to 15 per cent above capacity.

Pentaerythritol duty relief requested in UK

A REQUEST for temporary exemption from import duty on pentaerythritol has been placed before the UK's Department of Trade.

Duty exemption on pentaerythritol, melting point 210-235°C, has been requested to run until December 31, 1975.

BIP raises prices for melamine-formaldehyde

BRITISH Industrial Plastics (BIP) has increased its prices for melamine-formaldehyde moulding powders in the UK.

Prices for the company's top-grade granulated moulding material have risen from £546/ton to £601.50/ton. The increases are due mainly to recent melamine price rises; BOC increased its UK melamine prices by around 10 per cent on October 1.