

Good news for VCM

The Environmental Protection Agency had encouraging news for representatives of 29 vinyl chloride monomer and polyvinyl chloride producers who met with EPA officials in Washington last week. The discussions concerned the possibility of VCM contamination of ambient air near the producers' plants.

EPA Administrator Russell E. Train reported that the agency's monitoring of air and water close to VCM and PVC operations indicates that the pollutant level is not serious enough to threaten public health. EPA had tested air and water samples in the vicinities of 10 PVC plants and two VCM units located in different parts of the country to gather data to help it decide whether VCM ambient air standards may be necessary (*CW*, June 12, p. 14).

In the air measurements, more than 95% of the samples collected within a half-mile of plant property lines contained less than one part per million VCM concentration, according to EPA. In one instance, 3.4 ppm. was recorded three miles away, but several other readings at the same location averaged only 0.5 ppm.

Train emphasized that the findings were only preliminary and that EPA expected to conduct more testing.

He also said that at the present time "there is no basis for considering that the levels of vinyl chloride in water discharges or sludge, if handled properly, are hazardous to human health or aquatic life."

Several VCM and PVC producers, the EPA chief asserted, reported making substantial efforts to reduce VCM emissions and promised to aid EPA in its continuing study.

Waste stirs controversy

The Environmental Protection Agency this month granted Du Pont a one-year permit to dump wastes from its Belle, W. Va., chemical plant into the Gulf of Mexico about 200 miles southeast of New Orleans. But a federal judge last week barred the company from discharging industrial wastes into the Gulf off the coast of Florida.

Du Pont's earlier EPA-authorized dumping of wastes from the Belle plant came under fire from the state of Louisiana, which claimed that the disposal site, 50 miles off the coast of Louisiana, was too close to fisheries. As a result, Du Pont agreed to move its dumping site

150 miles farther out. The company asserts that the distance from shore, depth and current will be sufficient to protect fisheries. Louisiana, which has accepted the new arrangement, nevertheless says it will seek to have the permit revoked if the wastes are shown to have adverse effects on fisheries.

The wastes, which include sodium terephthalate, ethylene glycol, sodium styrene sulfonate and various metals, are now untreated. But Du Pont says it will have a plant in West Virginia onstream in about a year to treat the wastes.

The company also is planning a new land-based disposal site in West Virginia, expects to complete it by '75. The site, says Du Pont, will reduce its Gulf of Mexico dumping of organics by 94%, and "virtually all" the metal wastes will be disposed of at the new location.

As part of the agreement with EPA, Du Pont will underwrite a \$250,000 study to determine the effect of waste material on aquatic life at the Gulf site.

In the Florida action, U.S. District Court Judge David Middlebrooks issued a temporary injunction in Tallahassee against Du Pont, barring the firm from beginning disposal of wastes 250 miles south of Pensacola. The injunction, for 10 days, was sought by Florida officials, who contended that the wastes would harm marine life. Du Pont denied that claim. Hearings are slated to be held within 10 days to determine whether the injunction should be extended.

Standards under attack

The worker exposure standard for ethylenimine should be set aside because there is not sufficient evidence to support a finding that the substance is carcinogenic, an attorney representing the Synthetic Organic Chemical Manufacturers Assn. asserted last week. Donald L. Morgan told a three-judge U.S. Court of Appeals panel in Philadelphia that in promulgating the standards, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration failed to make the findings of fact or statements of reason that are required by law.

SOCMA and OSHA attorneys were in the court to present arguments on the challenge to the standard brought by SOCMA this year. A decision on the case is probably at least a month away.

Morgan maintained the OSHA relied on two tests on rodents in arriving at its standard. He challenged the first test because of the small number of rats tested, because it was conducted 20 years ago and because of the alleged inappropriate-

ness of the test methods. He conceded that tumors were formed in the rats but said it could not be ascertained whether they were malignant. The other test, conducted on mice a few years ago, also did not yield clear-cut evidence of carcinogenicity, according to Morgan.

An OSHA attorney responded that the two studies have been accepted by the scientific community and asserted that the industry is afraid to conduct its own rodent study on ethylenimine exposure.

Dow Wins Point: Meanwhile, OSHA granted Dow Chemical U.S.A. permission to follow substitute procedures to protect employees from exposure to two other allegedly carcinogenic chemicals, methyl chloromethyl ether and bis-chloromethyl ether. While Dow implements these procedures, OSHA will study the company's application for a temporary variance from the federal job safety standards for these chemicals.

OSHA standards require that laboratory bench hoods be equipped with exhaust air decontamination devices to protect employees from exposure to carcinogens. Dow asserts that it could not complete purchase and installation of the equipment until Feb. '75.

Compacts cloud market

Detroit auto makers are less than two months away from beginning '75-model production, but what materials the auto companies will be needing from chemical suppliers is anything but clear.

Key question: How important a factor will small cars be in the total production picture? Most industry observers say buyers overreacted to the Arab oil embargo last winter and pushed the small-car share of domestic auto sales to an "inflated" 54%. The percentage dropped sharply after that, but has now moved back up to about 48%. Big-car sales, meanwhile, are strengthening slowly. For example, some Cadillac dealers in the New York area report being sold out and back-ordered.

However, the impact of compacts will certainly be felt next year. General Motors, for instance, said recently that it will add five small-car lines to its '75 mix. But chemical industry supplies will be tuned to luxury items and peppy engine performance as much as to economy features. Among the winners: cut-pile carpeting, vinyl roofs, extensive plastic trim inside and out, and other items reserved in the past for bigger cars.

There'll be few surprises in novel uses of engineering materials, since compact