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EPA will order a 95% cut in vinyl chloride pollution

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WASHINGTON — Chemical manufacturers will be required to reduce by 95 per cent airborne emissions of vinyl chloride — a cancer-causing substance widely used in making plastics — under regulations to be issued soon by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The regulations are among the most detailed EPA ever has established for an air contaminant. The rules set emission limits for every phase in the vinyl chloride manufacturing process.

Special air pumps will be required to trap so-called fugitive emissions of vinyl

chloride gas that escape through vents and windows of chemical plants.

EPA officials said the standard would affect 41 plants which produce the toxic chemical, and would have to be met within 2½ years. Most U.S. vinyl chloride plants are in New Jersey, Louisiana, Illinois and Texas.

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Potentially dangerous traces of vinyl chloride gas have been detected in recent months as a result of federal monitoring near plants in New Jersey and Texas. Similar tests are planned at vinyl chloride plants elsewhere.

Approximately 4.6 million people live

within a five-mile radius of vinyl chloride plants, according to EPA.

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection officials said six major vinyl chloride manufacturers in the state would come under the regulations.

They are B.F. Goodrich, Salem County; Hooker Chemical Co., Burlington; Pantasote Co., Passaic; Tenneco Chemical Co. Plants in Burlington and Flemington, and Jannet Corp., Franklin Township.

The chemical industry has used vinyl chloride for decades in producing such plastic products as toys, phonograph records.

(Please turn to Page 30)

Vinyl chloride pollution cut ordered

(Continued from Page One)

appliances and vinyl jackets. The chemical attracted little notice until Jan. 22, 1974, when B.F. Goodrich, the leading producer of vinyl chloride in the country, disclosed that several of its chemical workers had died from angiosarcoma of the liver, a rare form of cancer.

The National Cancer Institute has since confirmed 27 cases of liver angiosarcoma among chemical workers with a history of exposure to vinyl chloride. Studies of occupational exposure to vinyl chloride indicate there is a latency period of up to 20 years between initial exposure to the organic chemical and occurrence of the disease.

Only a quarter of the vinyl chloride plants are 20 years or older. Most have opened in recent years.

The EPA regulations do not apply to some 8,000 plastic fabricating plants, which use polyvinyl chloride, a chemical derived from vinyl chloride. These plants account for about 10 per cent of the vinyl chloride in the air EPA said monitoring in the vicinity of several plants showed that vinyl chloride concentrations were too small to make the expense of cleaning up worthwhile.

Jack Farmer, who wrote the EPA regulations, said in an interview that the measure is essentially the same as regulations the agency proposed last December.

Farmer, chief of the standards development branch in EPA, said the regulations are designed to provide a reasonable margin of safety to protect public health from vinyl chloride. They require chemical firms to use the best available control technology.

The EPA crackdown is the last link in a chain of regulatory actions against vinyl chloride.

In 1974, the occupational health and safety administration, a branch of the Labor Department, issued rules limiting the exposure of chemicals workers to vinyl chloride. Plants unable to meet the standard have been required to provide workers with respirators.

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