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Vinyl-chloride levels increasing outside plant here?

By DENNIS POLITE

Louisville Times Staff Writer

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) said yesterday it found apparently increased concentrations of vinyl chloride in the air outside the Louisville B. F. Goodrich plant in tests conducted in early May.

The findings, EPA said, were generally higher than the concentrations found in earlier tests in March and ranged up to 33 parts per million at a point two-tenths of a mile from the center of the plant on Bell Lane.

In the May study, EPA said, its average finding was a concentration of about one-half part per million.

Meanwhile, the Louisville and Jefferson County Air Pollution Control Board said at its meeting yesterday that at one time the level of vinyl chloride released in the air locally reached an estimated level of 1,140 tons a year.

The board said a 1953-57 emission study showed that much vinyl chloride being released into the air.

In addition, the board said, concentrations of vinyl chloride were found as far as two miles from the plant during that time. It measured the level then at up to 5.9 parts per million.

Taken together, the two studies released yesterday indicate that not only has vinyl chloride been present in the air in measurable amounts but for a much longer time than has previously been reported.

Long-term exposure to vinyl chloride is believed to cause the rare liver cancer angiosarcoma. To date, however, scientists have not been able to pinpoint at what level the exposure becomes dangerous.

The federal and state Occupational Safety and Health Administration has set 50 parts per million as the upper limit to which workers may be exposed over an eight-hour period. In addition, the federal agency has proposed that new rules allow no exposure.

EPA said yesterday that its high reading of 33 parts per million was a one-time reading and emphasized that its average reading was less than one part per million over the one-week May period that it monitored the air around — but not inside — the local plant.

EPA said its findings were preliminary

and subject to refinements as they come under more intensive study.

The concern over human exposure to vinyl chloride began in January when the B. F. Goodrich Co. said it suspected that the deaths of three of its workers of angiosarcoma were due to exposure to vinyl chloride.

The death toll from angiosarcoma at B. F. Goodrich has since been raised to five. Two other cases have been found among workers at the Bell Lane plant. Both of those men are still living.

Other cases have been discovered around the country and in Europe.

In the aftermath of the initial disclosures, another controversy arose when it was reported that the chemical industry knew at least 18 months before the Goodrich announcement that vinyl chloride caused angiosarcoma.

The industry said it kept the information secret because that was the agreement under which it obtained the information from Italian scientist Cesare Maltoni and the European chemical industry for which he did the studies with animals.

Maltoni's studies showed that exposure to various levels of vinyl chloride as low as 250 parts per million caused tumors in rats. The tumors were identified as angiosarcoma of the liver.

EPA administrator Russell E. Train released the results to the manufacturers Tuesday. He urged them to reduce the emission of the gas as much as possible.

EPA also has asked the manufacturers to supply the government by Friday with the amount of vinyl chloride being released into the air from their plants and the amount of the chemical that is lost in the manufacturing process.

A Goodrich spokesman said Tuesday that it will be up to the federal government to release those figures once they are completed.

Train told the manufacturers, "There is no scientific evidence to indicate that these emissions pose an imminent hazard to people living near these plants."

"However, prudence dictates that reasonable steps should be promptly taken to reduce vinyl chloride emissions to the lowest practical level," he said.

In related developments surrounding the vinyl chloride situation:

► The Manufacturing Chemists Association says it will begin four new research projects involving exposure to vinyl chloride.

► The debate between the chemical association and the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health continues over who knew what when, and who told whom what in the controversy.

The chemical association has said it informed the safety institute of the Maltoni studies a year ago, but institute officials say they received no such information from the chemists until the day Goodrich made its first announcement.

Some of the debate has been carried in trade magazines in the form of articles and rebutting letters.

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Only 2 firms report to state on cancer risks

Associated Press

FRANKFORT, Ky.—Only two Kentucky industries have reported to the state what cancer-producing chemicals they use, although at least 50 must do so by July 1.

A state Labor Department regulation last year made Kentucky the first state in the nation to require its industries to report the carcinogens, or cancer-producing chemicals, they use.

Dr. J. Bradford Block, medical consultant to the department, said the major industries involved will be manufacturers of chemicals, paint and plastics.

He said the plastics industry may not realize it is included because vinyl chloride, which it uses, was only added to the list of carcinogens by the department last year. The federal government still does not include vinyl chloride as a carcinogen, he said.

The state, the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, the Center for Disease Control and the National Cancer Institute found vinyl chloride to be a suspected carcinogen after B.F. Goodrich in Louisville reported to the state last December that it might have a cancer producer. A company employee had died the day before of angiosarcoma, a rare form of liver cancer. That was the second such death at Goodrich in one year and the fourth since 1968.

Cancer-risk reports scarce

Associated Press

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