

Talbot

OSHA, NIOSH study brain-tumor deaths at Union Carbide facility

Following the discovery that 10 employees at Union Carbide's Texas City, Tex. plant had died of brain tumors, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health are conducting an epidemiological study of 8,000-10,000 present and former workers at the plant. The investigation resulted from a worker's complaint last November, alleging an abnormal incidence of brain tumors among personnel in the company's chemical-shipping area.

OSHA inspectors visited the plant on Dec. 13, 1978, and Jan. 8, 1979, and reported last week that examination of Carbide's medical records revealed 11 brain-tumor cases, including 10 deaths. Nine of the workers had died of a form of cancer called glioblastoma multiforme; the living worker is believed to have glioblastoma. The other employee died from meningioma, another type of brain tumor.

According to OSHA Administrator Eula Bingham, "The total number of brain tumors so far would appear to be higher than expected for a plant population this size." At the start of the investigation, which is expected to take about a year, vinyl chloride monomer is the leading suspect. While VCM is most commonly associated with angiosarcoma, a form of liver cancer, several studies have linked it to glioblastoma. Sanford Leffingwell, a NIOSH medical officer who is heading the epidemiological study, cites a 1976 study by Richard Waxweiler published by the New York Academy of Sciences, and a later study by Italian researcher Cesare Maltoni that showed an incidence of another type of brain tumor in rats exposed to VCM. A study supported by the MCA also recognized an incidence of glioblastoma among the workers exposed to VCM in its sample.

Carbide says that the affected workers were exposed to VCM in 1950-1965, but evidence at this point is far from conclusive. Leffingwell says that other chemicals in use at the plant, including ethylene oxide and acrylonitrile, are possible causes of brain tumors and will be examined. It is also possible, he points out, that the number of glioblastomas could turn out not to be excessive for a plant with approximately 2,000 employees. In the period since 1941, there have been 455 known deaths of Carbide employees at Texas City, although all 10 in which brain tumors were listed as the cause occurred

in the years between 1962 and 1978.

Shock Waves: Even the tentative link to VCM has sent tremors through the vinyl industry. On February 13, Union Carbide plant manager Damon L. Engle sent a letter to employees at Texas City apprising them of the brain-cancer cases. A similar letter was given to employees at Carbide's S. Charleston, W.Va., facility, and other VCM manufacturers were informed of the findings at Carbide. A Dow Chemical statement cautions against hasty correlation of the deaths with VCM. Dow says that mortality studies conducted recently at Freeport, Tex., and last year at its Plaquemine, La., VCM facilities failed "to show any indication of a similar situation. Both studies showed no deaths from brain tumors among VCM workers."

The joint OSHA-NIOSH investigation team is gathering data. As a result of findings to date, OSHA is also investigating a "compliance complaint" at Monsanto's operations in Texas City and says that it is possible that other plants will also be checked, though none has been identified.

Davis Layne, area director of OSHA's Houston office says "We are just beginning to turn the leaves, and it all depends on what turns up." □

Stauffer's board OK's 2-for-1 stock split

Stauffer Chemical's board last week approved a two-for-one stock-split proposal that they will present to shareholders on April 18 for final approval. The move is the latest in a string of stock-split proposals by such chemical companies as Du Pont, Mobil Corp., SmithKline, and Carlsle Corp., (CW, Feb. 14, p. 10).

H. Barclay Morley, Stauffer's chairman, said the proposed split would help bring the stock price, which was around \$40/share last week, down to a level that would be more attractive and affordable to investors.

The proposal calls for boosting Stauffer's authorization for shares to 70 million from the present 30 million. Right now there are about 21.9 million shares outstanding, and the largest shareholder among the board of directors, Christian de Dampierre, owns fewer than 2%.

The board also said that, if the shareholders approve the proposal, the board will consider boosting the second-quarter dividend by 10%, to 27.5¢/share after the split. The move would be in line with the company's policy of raising dividends to offset the effects of inflation. Stauffer has split its stock two for one twice in the past—in April 1957 and in May, 1976. □

Syntex nears naproxen lawsuit settlements

Pharmaceutical producer Syntex Corp. agreed last week to settle out of court all pending lawsuits with Syntex shareholders and Industrial Bio-Test Laboratories (IBT) connected with IBT's alleged deficiencies in testing Syntex's anti-arthritis drug, naproxen.

The agreement requires the companies to set up a \$2.75-million settlement fund, of which \$1.8 million would come from IBT, \$575,000 from Syntex, and \$375,000 from Syntex's insurance company. In exchange, the lawsuits would be dropped. The arrangement is still subject to court approval.

The settlement fund benefits class-action lawsuit plaintiffs, whose suits, filed in 1976 and later consolidated in federal court in New York, alleged that IBT was deficient in performing and reporting on a rat study of Syntex's Naprosyn naproxen. The suits also charged that Syntex knew or should have known about the alleged deficiencies, and that the prices of Syntex's securities were artificially inflated because of allegedly fraudulent representations and omissions stemming from the company's statements about naproxen. In addition, on Oct. 15, 1976, the Food and Drug Administration proposed withdrawing its approval of naproxen's new drug application on the grounds of the alleged deficiencies in the rat study by IBT for Syntex.

Syntex says it is agreeing on the settlement to avoid the "expenses of a lengthy trial, which would require our scientists and executives to waste months in courtrooms thousands of miles away." But the company admits no wrongdoing in the case, and, in earlier answers to the suits, denied all allegations of improper conduct. As of July 31, 1978, Syntex's worldwide sales of naproxen totaled \$87 million for the fiscal year. The non-hormonal anti-inflammatory drug, marketed in about 48 countries, is a major product in Syntex's human pharmaceuticals business.

Nalco Chemical, IBT's parent company, notes that, as part of the settlement, Syntex agreed to dismiss a suit the drug-maker filed against IBT in Chicago, once the settlement of the suits in New York is approved. And IBT's \$1.8-million payment under the settlement terms, Nalco says, will be charged against the reserve for discontinued operations set up by Nalco in 1978.

Syntex, meanwhile, says it has repeated the study of naproxen in question, and submitted it to FDA in late 1978, but so far has had no response from FDA. □

San Jacinto Day, Friday, April 20; Memorial Day, Monday, May 28; Independence Day, Wednesday, July 4; Labor Day, Monday, Sept. 3; Veterans Day, Monday, Nov. 12; Thanksgiving Day, Thursday, Nov. 22; Christmas Day, Tuesday, Dec. 25 and New Year's Day, Tuesday, Jan. 1, 1980.

Courthouse to be closed Monday

The Brazoria County Courthouse will be closed Monday, in observance of George Washington's Birthday.

The holiday, historically observed on Feb. 22, was one of several shifted to a Monday to allow public employees a long weekend holiday.

LJ Teenage Association to meet

The Lake Jackson Teenage Association will hold its first general meeting of the year in the Roberts Elementary School Cafeteria at 7:30 p.m. on Feb. 27.

The schedule for the coming year is to be announced and new officers will be introduced. The meeting is open to the public.

Instrument Society to meet

The Brazos Section of the Instrument Society of America will meet Thursday at the Knights of Columbus Hall, Highway 35, Angleton.

A social hour is set to begin at 6:30 p.m. with the meeting to follow at 7:30 p.m.

David Novak of United Controls will address the group on "Pre-Packaged Analyzer Systems."

SEEN AND HEARD

RICHARD McLERRAN of Clute making the dean's list at Baylor University for the Fall semester.

VIOLA BRANDON PITTS, now at the Lake Jackson Nursing Home after living in the Freeport area since 1929. She'd like to hear from all her friends.

Speaking for the first time about the Brazoria County Grand Jury's decision to no-bill the council for allegedly violating the Texas Open Meetings Law, Rollwage said Friday afternoon, "Certainly I am gratified by the grand jury decision."

And noting the nearness of the April 7 city elections, he added, "My hope is that the discouragement of these events will not prevent good candidates from seeking public office."

"A good result could be that all citizens of Lake Jackson will take renewed interest in their government and will carefully

AA MacLean, the city manager; and Joyce Schumann, the only council member not arrested and charged with violating the law, the grand jury decided not to indict the councilmen.

Rollwage said about the decision, "I regret that the hearing was not in public."

"The five council members asked for an examining trial in public two months ago and asked that subpoenas be issued for Bill Billingsley, A.A. MacLean and Joyce Schumann so their testimony under oath might be made public."

"Now the grand jury has heard their testimony in

closed doors to the public."

"The accusations against the council members have done nothing but damage. Further, the accusations have been a tremendous burden to the council members and their families and have hampered their productivity in all areas of their lives."

Rollwage also added that he could not say now what effect the grand jury decision would have on the five \$1.5 million libel suits filed against Billingsley by Rollwage, Carl Dodson, Bill Frizzell, Rex Colvin and George Gabriles, the five council members

ACTION FILED BY LJ COUNCILMAN

Publisher says suit 'abridgement of freedom'

LAKE JACKSON — Attorneys for Brazorian News publisher Bill Billingsley, his wife, and the newspaper have filed an official answer denying the allegations contained in a damage suit filed against them Jan. 17 by Lake Jackson City Councilman George Gabriles.

The answer, filed this week with the Brazoria County District Clerk's office, cites the suit as an

abridgement of freedom of the press.

Gabriles alleged that he was falsely accused of breaking the laws of the state and that Billingsley caused those allegations to be published in the Brazorian News, other newspapers, and to be broadcast on television and radio.

Gabriles' suit was filed after Billingsley brought charges against Gabriles and four other Lake

Jackson officials for alleged violation of the Open Meetings Law.

All five — Mayor Bill Rollwage and Councilmen Bill Frizzell, Rex Colvin, Bill Dodson, and Gabriles — were officially no-billed by the Brazoria County Grand Jury Feb. 7.

Councilwoman Joyce Schumann, who was never charged, also was no-billed by the grand jury on Feb. 7.

Charges were filed

against the five Lake Jackson officials Dec. 7 by Billingsley. The charges were initially dropped by Justice of the Peace Harold Ammons on the recommendation of then-District Attorney Ogden Bass.

Doyle Neighbours, who was appointed Bass' successor, agreed to present the case to the grand jury early in January.

Billingsley's answer,

filed Feb. 12, notes that when he learned that Gabriles had not attended the council meeting in question, he immediately agreed the charge against Gabriles be dropped.

Billingsley's general denial contends that his articles were written in good faith and related to matters that were affairs of public interest and concern.

Also, the court documents say that the

articles were a substantially true, fair and impartial account of an official proceeding in a court of justice and constituted fair comment or criticism on matters of public interest.

Billingsley's attorneys contend that any damages would be improper because they would be a deterrent and restraint to the publication of news in violation of the First and (Please turn to P. 5, Col. 1)

Stunning Cars Drive

Have you stopped your car to allow a child to cross the street recently? Or perhaps helped someone push a stalled vehicle to the side of the road or a gas station?

Then check these license plate numbers. You could win \$50.

The numbers are: JVS 43, ME 2075, QYH 427, and mail truck number 2062 (no plate number).

This is all part of the Brazoria County Police Officers' Association's Partners in Safety program.

The program is designed to award persons for courtesy exhibited while driving.

Members of area police departments, peace officers associations, or the public can nominate someone for the prize. The object is to turn someone's license plate number into

the association after they have been seen displaying courtesy or helping someone in distress on the road.

If one of the persons whose license plate number is listed above calls in, he wins \$50. If two call in, the prize is \$25. For three, the prize is \$10.33 each, and four, \$12.50.

If your license plate number is one of the above call the Peace Officers' Association at 233-4011 and 233-4463.

If you see someone you would like to recommend for a prize, write the license plate number down, along with the location, what the driver did, and the time it happened.

If the one you turn in wins, you will receive an identical prize.

Mail your recommendation to: B.C.P.O.A. Safety, Box 1300, Angleton, 77515.

Dow finds no link of vinyl chloride to tumors

The Dow Chemical Company, in a statement released Friday, has concluded that its own and outside studies show no correlation between brain tumors and exposure to vinyl chloride, which is manufactured at Dow's Texas Division in Freeport.

"What we know about the health of Dow workers exposed to vinyl chloride enables us to conclude that such brain tumors are not a problem in our work force," the statement said.

The Houston Post, in a copyright story released Friday, said federal health authorities had confirmed that an unusually high number of workers at Union Carbide's Texas City plant died of a type of brain tumor that has been linked to the cancer-causing agent vinyl chloride.

Vinyl chloride was once manufactured and is now processed at the large chemical and plastics plant.

The newspaper said it had learned that nine employees of the Texas City plant died between 1962 and 1978 of a brain tumor known as glioblastoma multiform.

A top Labor Department official was quoted as saying that scientists associate vinyl chloride with the tumor.

"What we know about the health of Dow workers exposed to vinyl chloride enables us to conclude that such brain tumors are not a problem in our work force," the statement says.

"Also, epidemiological studies on large worker populations in the United States and Great Britain show no correlation between such brain tumors and vinyl chloride exposure."

Dow said a worker complaint in November 1978 prompted a joint study by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

The study revealed that the nine deaths caused by the tumor would "appear to be higher than expected" at that particular plant. About 455 death certificates from 1962 to 1978 have been examined to date.

A tenth worker who is still living has been diagnosed as probably having the same form of tumor.

The Post said health records of current and former Texas City plant workers — 8,000 to 10,000 people — are being reconstructed for study by the OSHA-NIOSH scientists.

It said the records, which company officials describe as "sketchy," and "difficult to piece together," go back to 1941.

The Dow Statement says, "From our reading of the Texas City situation, it is too early to conclude that the cases of brain tumors were caused by vinyl chloride monomer. We do not mean to downplay the seriousness of current investigations, but we caution against jumping to conclusions as to the cause of the deaths."

Dow employees involved with vinyl chloride have been notified of the situation, the statement said.

A similar mortality study among Dow vinyl workers at Freeport did not show any indication of a similar situation, the statement said, adding that a similar study on Dow workers at Plaquemine reached the same conclusion.

In 1975, another Dow mortality study, focused on 594 workers exposed to vinyl chloride in Midland, Mich., identified two brain cancer deaths, but the statement says these were not believed related to vinyl chloride exposures.

Texas City's Union Carbide Plant Manager Damon Engle was quoted Thursday as saying the company doesn't think there is a crisis that poses immediate exposure hazards to employees.

"Practically all of the affected employees worked for substantial periods of time from the mid-40s through the present in a period in which neither the government or the company had any reason to suspect vinyl chloride," Engle told the Post.

Engle said the company was not ready to assume vinyl chloride is responsible for the deaths.

"We do think that if vinyl chloride should ultimately be implicated that the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the industry should take credit for recognizing hazards at this stage," Engle said.