

JJH: JGL: TGG: RF
XF: ~~RF~~ Benzene

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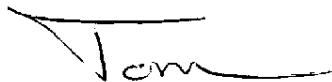
FROM: T. G. Grumbles
DATE: FEBRUARY 27, 1985

Interoffice
Communication

SUBJ: BENZENE STUDY

VISTA

Enclosed is an article from the 2/27 Wall Street Journal regarding an update on Past Benzene studies. The data is not really new but the publicity given this and recent Shell findings may be enough to pressure OSHA into proposing a new Benzene standard.



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Enclosure

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VVV 000015957

Study Links Benzene Exposure Level Allowed by U.S. to Higher Cancer Risk

By BARRY MEIER

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

NEW YORK—Workers exposed to benzene in the atmosphere at levels permitted by federal regulations run a vastly greater risk of getting cancer than those who aren't exposed, according to a government study.

In an interview, Robert Rinsky, an epidemiologist with the Cincinnati-based National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, said a study he directed found that workers also may face an "appreciable" increased risk of cancer from exposure to benzene at even one-tenth of the U.S.-allowed level.

The study, which is currently under scientific review, is likely to increase pressure on the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to toughen regulations on worker exposure to benzene. The agency, which has said for several years that it intends to lower the benzene exposure limit, repeatedly has been criticized by unions and others for failing to move on the issue.

Benzene is widely used in petroleum products and in making plastics, solvents and other materials. The government has estimated that about 600,000 U.S. workers are exposed to the chemical. A number of studies have linked benzene exposure to leukemia.

OSHA Proposal

An OSHA spokeswoman yesterday said the agency is in the "final stages" of developing a proposal to reduce workplace exposure to benzene, but a target date for issuing that recommendation hasn't been set.

OSHA's current limit for worker exposure to benzene is 10 parts per million in the air. In 1976, the agency proposed lowering that limit to one part per million, but met stiff industry resistance. Two years later, the Supreme Court rejected the OSHA proposal on the ground that the agency had failed to prove that the 10-part-per-million level posed a significant health risk to workers.

Although Mr. Rinsky declined to disclose his exact findings, he said the study showed that workers exposed to 10 parts per million of benzene in the workplace atmosphere run more than "30 times" the risk of leukemia than do employees who aren't exposed to the substance. The scientist also said that an increased risk of occupational cancer from benzene also occurred at the one-part-per-million level and below.

Workplace Exposure Reduced

NIOSH, which acts as a research arm for OSHA, previously called for a lowering of the benzene workplace exposure standard to one part per million. Also, some industrial producers and users of benzene have said they significantly have reduced workplace exposure to benzene.

A NIOSH spokesman said Mr. Rinsky's study updated past health reviews of workers employed in benzene-related jobs between the late 1930s and early 1970s. The significant aspect of the new study was that Mr. Rinsky's report attempted to correlate incidences of cancer with specific levels of benzene exposure, the spokesman said.

The spokesman said the agency won't comment on the study's findings until the report has been reviewed by NIOSH scientists. He added that the agency's general policy was then to submit an approved report to a scientific journal for publication.

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