

STATEMENT BY SENATOR JOHN V. TUNNEY
BEFORE THE ENVIRONMENT SUBCOMMITTEE
OF THE COMMERCE COMMITTEE
AUGUST 21, 1974 - 9:50 a.m.

The Environment Subcommittee of the Commerce Committee is meeting today to examine evidence on the dangers of vinyl chloride. This hearing will be focusing on ways to mitigate the problems involved with vinyl chloride as well as ways to avoid crisis of this type in the future.

It is absolutely indefensible to me that the only way we became aware of the dangers of vinyl chloride was because of the deaths of at least 16 vinyl chloride workers. All died from a rare form of liver cancer which, subsequently, has been directly linked to exposure to vinyl chloride. Not only does vinyl chloride cause liver cancer among workers, but depending on length of exposure, it has also been shown to increase the risk of cancer of the lung, lymphatic system, brain, and urinary organs.

In response to this situation, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration has proposed a standard allowing no detectable level of vinyl chloride in factory air. The American plastics industry has stated that should this proposed rule be implemented it would cost the nation up to 2.2 million jobs and as much as \$90 billion in annual production.

Vinyl chloride manufacturing workers are not the only ones endangered by exposure to vinyl chloride. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission announced last week that it will ban the use of vinyl chloride in aerosol household products. In issuing the ban, the Commission pointed out that "consumers are always subject to inhalation of the substance whenever they use aerosols that contain it. And there is no known safe exposure level."

The Environmental Protection Agency issued an emergency order on April 24 to halt the sale of cans of pesticide sprays containing vinyl chloride. In addition, EPA is currently examining the possibility that vinyl chloride emissions in the atmosphere surrounding manufacturing plants pose a hazard to people living near the plants.

The Food and Drug Administration has banned the use of vinyl chloride as a propellant in cosmetic and drug containers. The FDA is currently evaluating the need for restricting the use of vinyl chloride for food packaging materials.

An obvious conclusion is the need to evaluate chemicals and dangerous substances before people are exposed to them. Since vinyl chloride has been around for so long, banning it now would cause drastic dislocation in the plastics industry.

The Congress currently is working on legislation dealing with the pre-market testing and approval of toxic substances before they can inflict death or illness. I believe it is essential, and I hope the hearing record compiled today will back this up, that we establish some orderly, comprehensive system for evaluating substances before we're confronted with a Hobson choice between protecting health or preserving jobs.