

United Rubber Workers Sponsor Two-Day Vinyl Chloride Workshop

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Vinyl chloride workers got a rare opportunity to discuss the Permanent Standard on vinyl chloride with government and medical experts May 15-16 during a URW-sponsored workshop held in Akron, Ohio.

Peter Bonmarito, URW International president, said some 60 URW local unions involved in the manufacture and use of polyvinyl chloride resin attended the two-day workshop at the Canandaigua Inn.

Participating in the workshop were representatives of the Department of Labor's Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA), the Department of Health, Education & Welfare (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health), and the Center for Disease Control and the University of North Carolina School of Public Health.

Louis G. Hollister, URW Industrial Hygiene director and a prime mover in developing many standards protecting workers from occupational hazards, was coordinator of the workshop.

Sheldon Samuels, AFL-CIO Industrial Union Department (IUD) Health, Safety and Environment director, spoke Thursday.

Bonmarito said the workshop was aimed at training workers who are exposed to vinyl chloride with regard to employer and employee responsibility as it relates to medical surveillance, respiratory protection, training, record keeping, etc.

As required by the vinyl chloride Permanent Standard, vinyl chloride is an insidiously lethal gas used by the plastic industry to manufacture polyvinyl chloride which is used extensively in the production of plastic products.

Awareness to vinyl chloride hazards was heightened in the country when the gas was linked to the cancer deaths of four Goodyear workers in Louisville, Ky. The gas causes a rare and fatal liver cancer (angiosarcoma) as well as cancers of the brain, skin and other vital organs.

The vinyl chloride federal Permanent Standard was announced Oct. 6, 1974 and was to have been effective Jan. 1, 1975.

The Society of Plastics Engineers filed suit against this important standard which was stayed in New York, N. Y. Second Circuit Court on Dec. 12, 1974.

But the court lifted the stay Jan. 31, ordering the date of April 1, 1975 for the Permanent Standard to take effect. At that time, Bonmarito observed that the panel of judges "did finally realize that the life and death struggle of vinyl chloride workers is more important than profits."

Bonmarito said representatives from several other international unions as well as vinyl chloride respiratory equipment manufacturers attended the conference.

The URW has been a leader in worker hazard protection and intimately involved in the promulgation of the Permanent Standard.

Help for vinyl chloride workers

New limits on the use of vinyl chloride (a gas) in the manufacture of plastics will remain in effect. The Supreme Court today let stand a U.S. Circuit Court decision upholding the standards that prohibit exposure of workers to more than one part vinyl chloride to a million parts of air. Before the new standards became effective April 1, the limit was 50 parts per million.

Vinyl chloride has been blamed for at least two dozen cancer deaths worldwide. The standards apply to about 6,000 workers making vinyl chloride or turning it into plastics, and to 350,000 to 700,000 workers making plastic products. Some firms had argued that it was not technologically feasible to reduce vinyl chloride to the new level.

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Goodrich still making plastic for bottles

The B. F. Goodrich Chemical Co. isn't going to get out of the business of providing raw materials for the plastic-bottle industry after all.

Indeed, the company said that it has developed a new material for use in manufacturing food and liquid containers that will not transmit the controversial chemical, vinyl chloride, from the container into the product being packaged.

The B. F. Goodrich subsidiary has borne the brunt of the safety controversy over vinyl chloride, a basic chemical to the plastics industry, since it was discovered that at least seven of its Louisville employees had died of a rare cancer of the liver after being exposed to vinyl chloride fumes. Various studies also indicated that the chemical might be leaching from containers into food products.

While the firm had intended to get out of the business of supplying the container industry with materials made from vinyl chloride this month, the company now says it has become economically feasible to continue to provide the compounds.

Firm says it has made gains

Goodrich said it has achieved "improved technical and production capabilities" that allow it to remain a supplier to the plastics container industry.

In addition to becoming a newly identified occupational health hazard for the plastics and chemical industries as a result of the Goodrich disclosures of its health problems at its Bellis Lane plant here, the problem of vinyl chloride leaching into food products has raised fears in the food and beverage industries.

The government ordered distillers to stop using plastics in the packaging of liquor after it was found that vinyl chloride was leaching into it after periods of several months.

At least two dozen chemical workers are known to have died of the rare liver cancer, angiosarcoma, worldwide. Seven of the workers were employed at the Louisville Goodrich plant and two more local Goodrich workers are being treated for the disease.

Stricter rules on vinyl gas to be enforced

The Supreme Court's refusal to review federal vinyl chloride standards means that the state won't be active in this area of law enforcement, both state and federal officials said yesterday.

The Supreme Court's action means that the federal standards will be left in force, and will be the standards in Kentucky since they are much stricter than the current state standards. Under federal state standards.

Under federal statute, the state Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is to have enforcement power when its standards are as strict or stricter than federal rules. Otherwise the federal OSHA is in charge of enforcement.

The new standards will limit exposure to one part vinyl chloride per million parts of air.

Seven employees of the B.F. Goodrich plant on Bell Lane in Louisville have died of a rare liver cancer thought to be caused by breathing vinyl chloride, a gas used to make plastic.

Goodrich has said the standards will not affect its operations.

The company also announced it will stay in the business of supplying raw plastics to make bottles and other containers of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastic. Earlier, the company had announced it would withdraw from the market.

"Current manufacturing costs and our improved technical and production capabilities make it attractive for us to continue to offer quality general-purpose and food grade compounds for clear PVC bottles," the company said.

The company said the new material doesn't leach vinyl chloride into food or drink packaged in the container.

The Supreme Court action ends any possibility of company appeal of the federal rules.

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Official asks Goodrich bond

Jefferson County Atty. J. Bruce Miller said yesterday he will recommend employees of B.F. Goodrich and other persons in the plant's neighborhood be guaranteed certain protections before the county issues pollution abatement bonds for the company.

The county plans to authorize \$6.5 million worth of bonds.

Distillery Workers (Synthetic Rubber Workers) Local 72, the union that represents the majority of the employees at the plant on Bells Lane, has asked the company to guarantee that no jobs will be lost because of the pollution-control project and that any employee or other person suffering ill health because of exposure to chemicals at the plant will be compensated.

Miller said yesterday that after meeting with the union's attorney, Herb Segal, he would recommend that the company set up a trust fund to aid anyone, whether an employee or not, who suffers because of exposure to chemicals at the plant.

Seven former employees of the plant have died of a rare liver cancer thought to be caused by exposure at work to a chemical vinyl chloride.

Miller said, "If 15 years down the road citizens in the area have something happen to them they need protection. If the company agrees to the trust fund it would establish their good faith."

Miller also said that he agrees with the idea that no jobs should be lost. But he stressed that he is recommending such conditions be written into the bonds without really knowing how it might affect such things as their salability. He said he will turn the recommendation over to the county's bond attorney, Spencer Harper, for further study.

Miller said the company "has some form of responsibility" to make such guarantees because it plans to use "public bonds" to build its pollution-control facilities.

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