

New vinyl chloride-exposure regs draw fire

UNREALISTIC, unnecessarily stringent, and probably impossible for most, if not all, of the industry to meet, were the immediate industry reactions to the Labor Department's vinyl chloride exposure regulation.

Tough new standards were announced by the department's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) in Washington last week. Starting Jan. 1, vinyl chloride levels in the air that workers breathe must be held to 1 ppm, averaged over an 8-hr period.

Actual levels may exceed this level for short periods. But, they must average out to no more than 5 ppm for any 15-min period within the 8-hr time span.

The standards will be applicable to producers of monomer, polymer, and fabricated materials. Only workers who handle only finished products are exempted. There is no limit on the size of the work force.

The existing provisional standard which permits a 50-ppm level will continue until the new standard takes effect. On Jan. 1, 1976, it will become mandatory for workers exposed to more than the 1 or 5-ppm levels to wear respirators. Until then, respirators will be optional, provided the exposure is not more than 25 ppm.

Reactions. The Society of the Plastics Industry immediately filed a petition for a judicial review of the standard. Society Pres. Ralph L. Harding, Jr., called the standard unrealistic and probably impossible to meet for most, if not all, of the plastics industry. It appears, he said, to have been developed on some basis inconsistent with recorded facts.

Dow Chemical Co. viewed the standards as unnecessarily stringent. They are not supported by the data on Dow workers that were presented at public hearings. These data showed no excess mortality from any cause among long-term workmen exposed to levels below 200 ppm.

C. B. Branch, Dow president, said, "Our data, based on nearly 25 years of experience without any cases of liver cancer, indicate that the new standard is more restrictive than necessary to protect the health of our workers."

"We had, as early as 1961, dropped the then accepted exposure standard of 500 ppm to 50 ppm voluntarily as

our Dow standard. Dow Chemical U.S.A. is currently operating under conditions that limit worker exposure to less than 10 ppm on an 8-hr time weighted average."

These low levels can only be achieved, he said, through advanced engineering methods and good work practices on the part of Dow employees. "We question the ability of the industry to develop the technology to meet the level of 1 ppm time weighted average and a 5-ppm ceiling in the time specified. We will seek remedies through the judicial process," Branch said.

The department is giving its enforcement staff discretion to deter-

mine how the companies must meet the standard. While the goal is to reach the new levels through engineering and work-practice controls, such controls must be feasible.

Companies can deal with any exposures produced by inadequate controls by giving workers respirators.

The standard also calls for regular monitoring of plant air, regular medical exams for workers, and setting up of regulated areas where vinyl chloride exposure is high. Workers are also prohibited from direct contact with liquid vinyl chloride monomer. Warning signs must be posted saying that the chemical is a "cancer-suspect agent."

Mainland China claims first-half oil production up 21.3%

MAINLAND China has reported big percentage gains in oil production and refining during first-half 1974. But specific figures on the nation's petroleum industry continue to be withheld.

Crude output jumped 21.3% and refinery production 18.2% during the first 6 months of this year over the same 1973 period, according to Peking Review. Most foreign observers estimated China's average 1973 oil production—of both natural crude and shale oil—at between 800,000 b/d and 1,000,000 b/d.

Some Japanese sources now predict China's crude output may reach 1,200,000 b/d this year, 2,000,000 b/d in 1976, and as much as 8,000,000 b/d in the 1980's. This would place it in the Saudi Arabian category as an oil source.

These sources also speculate that Japan may be able to increase imports of Chinese oil from about 80,000 b/d this year to 400,000 b/d by the end of 1975.

Peking Review said crude output at China's largest field—Taching in Manchuria—rose 24.7% in first-half 1974 over first-half 1973. Gain at Shengli, located near the mouth of the Yellow River southeast of Tientsin, reportedly was 12.2%. And the Old Yumen fields in North Central China "overfulfilled their plan."

No specific mention was made of offshore oil production, which is believed to be under way in the Gulf of Pohai near the Yellow River delta. But Peking Review said Takang field (believed to be the Gulf of Pohai field) increased crude output 22.5% above the first-half 1973 level.

The status of Chinese oil production continues to be clouded in controversy. Japanese reports tend to be on the highly optimistic side, while the Russians—who are inclined to downgrade all aspects of China's economic progress—label reports of big Chinese crude-output gains as unsubstantiated "sensationalism."

Writing in the newspaper *Sotsialisticheskaya Industriya* (Socialist Industry), one of the U.S.S.R.'s leading geologists, Lenin Prize Winner F. Salmanov said recently that "there's no proof" that commercial oil production has been achieved anywhere in the East China basin.

By Russian definition, this area—with Peking on the northwestern edge—encompasses 340,000 sq mile. It includes part of the North China basin bordering on and extending into the Gulf of Pohai and the Shengli fields, as well as the East China basin proper, which includes the coastal zone facing the East China Sea to a point south of Shanghai and the adjacent coastal shelf.