



PVC WORKERS use respirators with air-hose attachments to keep exposure to VCM below 1 ppm.

Masked men get drop on VCM

PVC plants meet new OSHA standard with few exceptions, but most must use respirators and lose some production to comply

If requests for variances are any criterion, most polyvinyl chloride plants have complied with the Apr. 1 deadline limiting worker exposure to 1-ppm. vinyl chloride monomer.

Only four companies—Firestone, Union Carbide, Air Products and Chemicals, Borden—have applied to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration for temporary variances. And all operating PVC plants appear to have reduced time-weighted average exposures to the monomer to well under the 25-ppm. limit that went into effect in April 1975. But meeting the new 1-ppm. limit requires "extensive use of respirators," say several chemical companies.

And with extensive engineering changes still being made at a number of older plants, requests for an extension of standards usually are being based on the difficulty of doing construction work while wearing respirators.

Air Products, for example, has a major rebuilding project under way at its Pensacola, Fla., plant, where it is expanding capacity from 80 million lbs./year to 150 million by December. And changes are being made at its Calvert City, Ky., unit. Delays in equipment delivery are slowing progress toward minimum use of respirators.

Firestone, whose request for an interim six-week extension was turned down by OSHA (*CW*, Mar. 24, p. 9), is waiting for

a response to its request for a variance until Sept. 30 for discretionary use of respirators. Last week the company closed its Pottstown, Pa., plant to complete six to seven weeks of construction work. Operation continues, with respirators, at Perryville, Md.

"The temporary variance was requested because it was our judgment that we could not continue the massive engineering changes and equipment installations required in our polymerization buildings if our craftsmen were required to wear respiratory equipment on a full-time basis," says Todd C. Walker, president of Firestone Plastics.

"Under the law, we can grant variances only when equipment is unavailable," says John Concannon, chief of the division of variance determination for OSHA.

Union Carbide isn't optimistic about its request for a one-year extension, and the company says 62 workers at its Texas City, Tex., suspension-resin plant will have to put on respirators for "extended periods and they won't like it." The average respirator time there is 30%, longer for maintenance work, Carbide adds.

Another reason for its request for an extension, says Carbide, is the "uncertainty about the Environmental Protection Agency regulations for VCM emissions from the plant." EPA initially proposed a 90% reduction of emissions;



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