

Vinyl Chloride Costs On Safety Seen High

By Richard E. Rotman
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A vice president of Tenneco, Inc., a huge vinyl chloride manufacturer, predicted yesterday that it would take two to three years and at least \$10 million to reach safety levels five times that of proposed government standards.

Testifying at Occupational Safety and Health Administration hearings, Joseph Fath called the government's attempt to eliminate detectable traces of vinyl chloride "unrealistic and impossible."

Evidence has been mounting recently to link vinyl chloride—a key chemical used in the manufacture of many plastics—with angiosarcoma, a rare cancer of the liver. Of 13 known cases of workers contracting the disease, only three workers remain alive.

Taking a position identical to vinyl manufacturers and processors, Tenneco representatives called workers' deaths "tragic" but denied any had had the disease in their employment. Twenty workers connected with Tenneco's vinyl chloride processing have died in the last 17 years, although none, the company said, have had angiosarcoma.

One possible solution for reducing the effects of harmful levels of the chemical is the use of respirators and other artificial air sources. Before April 5, the government had allowed 500 parts of vinyl chloride per million of air until the suspicious deaths had changed standards to 50 parts per million. The "no detectable level" is 1 or 2 parts per million.

In some stages of the gas' formation into records, seat covers, electrical insulation and paint, workers reduce its presence to 25 to 50 parts per million with gas masks. But artificial air can only be used for short periods of time without causing harm to lungs and nostrils so something else must be devised, the industry and government have agreed.

Ventilation, outdoor manufacturing, and improved valves, flanges and hose connectors can reduce harmful levels. But engineering completely airtight connections is so difficult that the industry now loses 5 per cent of its product, Fath said.

The industry has predicted that if the 4.6 billion-pound fabrication of vinyl chloride were shut down, 2.2 million jobs and as much as \$90 billion in production would be lost.

A labor leader has called the statistics "blackmail." In earlier testimony, United Rubber Workers President Pete Bommarito, supported the government's efforts despite the possible loss in jobs.

"This is no easy position to take," Bommarito said, "but there is no alternative. 'We have both our jobs and our lives at risk.'"

The Labor Department also disputed the industry's contention that new standards would stop vinyl chloride production and use. However, some marginal firms, the department admitted, might be threatened if forced to raise prices to pay for safety standards.

In New York, an AFL-CIO meat cutters union official revealed that cutting meat wrapping with hot wires releases fumes which cause dizziness, wheezing and a lack of breath.

The official, Ralph Quatrocchi, said, "Occupational illnesses which result in cancer and ultimately death is a price no worker should have to pay for his protection."

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