

2 chemicals suspected as cause of rare form of fatal cancer

By John Nussbaum

Vinyl chloride and polyvinyl chloride, synthetic chemicals used in a variety of manufacturing processes, are suspected culprits in three fatal cases of a rare form of cancer.

The chemicals are the subject of intense investigations by the B. F. Goodrich Co., the United Rubber Workers and the International Chemical Workers Unions, National Institute of Occupational Safety and

Health (NIOSH) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

The investigations began when Goodrich on Jan. 22 reported it was examining all employees involved in producing and handling the chemicals to determine whether three deaths from hemangiosarcoma (cancer of the blood vessels) of the liver were job-related.

The deaths occurred in December 1973, March 1973 and September 1971 in Goodrich's plant in Louisville, Ky. The URW says another 1968 cancer death may stem from the same cause.

The reason the cases in

one plant drew attention is that only about 21 cases a year are reported in the United States, according to the chemical union. The union has asked its 90,000 members in the United States and Canada to furnish data they may have about the use and effects of the chemicals.

Investigation of the chemicals, and possible regulatory government action, will be coordinated at a meeting Tuesday in the Sheraton Hopkins International Airport.

The conference will include Dr. Irving Selikoff, a New York occupational health expert; Peter Bom-

marito, president of the URW and chairman of the health and welfare division of the AFL-CIO industrial union, and representatives of the unions, government health agencies and the public health schools of Harvard University and the University of North Carolina. The two universities conduct the URW's occupational health program.

The unions and Goodrich had met with Dr. Selikoff's staff at New York's Mount Sinai Hospital Jan. 30 and in Washington last week, according to a URW spokesman. Another meeting is scheduled Friday in Washington. The U. S. Labor Department may be asked to set emergency standards for the chemicals during the investigation.

The government recently issued standards for 14 chemicals discovered to cause cancer, but vinyl chloride and polivinyl chlorides were not included.

Dr. Selikoff figured prominently in research leading to the identification of the 14 chemicals. He also was instrumental in the identification in recent years of asbestosis, a lung disease, as an occupational disease of asbestos workers.

Louis Beliczky, the chemical workers union's director of industrial hygiene, said chemical-related can-

cer "usually has a latency of up to 20 years." Since the use of vinyl is relatively recent, he said it is possible the cases of liver cancer discovered so far may be the first of several more.

If the chemicals are found to be the cause, safeguards could be established to protect potential victims.

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