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Dow Chemical U.S.A.

Texas Division

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**DOW ANSWERS
BENZENE ALLEGATIONS**

"The health of Dow benzene workers is not in danger," Dr. John Venable, Medical Director of Dow Chemical U.S.A.'s Texas Division, stated today following publication of a story citing alleged benzene hazards among Dow workers.

"Our primary concern is, and always has been, the health and well-being of our employees. Continuing periodic medical examinations tell us much more than cytogenetic studies about the health of our people," Venable emphasized.

Dow has pioneered cytogenetic studies in industry but stresses that the activity is research in nature. The scientific community recognizes that cytogenetics is a new and developing tool that someday will probably be useful in medical surveillance, but is not regarded as such today.

To help place cytogenetics in proper perspective, Dow quotes James H. Jandl, M.D., the George Richards Minot Professor of Medicine at Harvard University, writing in August, 1977, "The issue of chromosomal changes in benzene toxicity remain a subject for speculation and investigation; it does not at present deserve to play a role in routine hematologic (blood) surveillance."

Referring to a study of 52 benzene workers at Dow, Venable said that an analysis of the cytogenetic data showed medically significant

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chromosomal aberrations with only two people. "Dow's cytogenetic consultant and I met with those two employees and discussed the medical implications of their chromosome abnormalities," Venable said. "Neither case was related to benzene exposure."

The consultant referred to is Dr. Cecil Jacobson, Associate Clinical Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology and Adjunct Professor of Genetics at George Washington University.

Premature conclusions cited by Dr. Dante Picciano, a former Dow employee who resigned earlier this year, ignore complete environmental exposure data of the employees involved in the study.

Medical surveillance has been conducted on benzene workers at the Texas Division since 1961. This includes periodic physical examinations, blood analysis and urinary screening test for benzene, recognized throughout the medical profession as standard for determining any adverse effect of exposure to benzene.

Considerable comment has been generated by the cytogenetic study of 52 workers but there is nothing in the analysis of the data to support the claim that, other than the two cases cited, there are any medical abnormalities.

"We do not practice medicine by statistical maneuvering," Venable said, referring to the report of the 52-worker study which ignored the high level exposure data and was basically a "one-point-in-time" study.

Dow has environmental measurements taken in its benzene plants showing exposures to benzene of over 100 parts per million in 1973. The company contends, and is supported by published literature, that high exposures to benzene can cause chromosome abnormalities.

Manufacturing and medical experience for previous years supports the company's contention that Dow workers in the past were exposed to levels exceeding what the current Federal standard allows (10 ppm) for short periods of time.

Parts per million is the standard measurement used to determine the amount of a substance present in the environment. The current Occupational Safety and Health Administration level for benzene is 10 parts per million. The agency has dictated a one-part-per-million level but this has been stayed by the Federal Court in New Orleans.

"On one hand we are talking about a medical evaluation of an individual test by a medical consultant, whereas on the other hand, a newspaper report is talking about a statistical method applied to a group analysis of all the test cells pooled together," Venable said.

"Good medical practice is not governed by a questionable statistical aberration applied to a test which is still in a research and developmental phase," the Dow Medical Director concluded.

* * * *

Various attempts to prevent the transfer of authority from the Interior Department to the Labor Department also were rejected by the House.

Congressman Ike Andrews (D-NC) offered an amendment to HR 4287 that would have allowed states to issue and administer their own mine health and safety plans and standards. The House voted 169 to 165 against that amendment.

Congressman Joseph Gaydos (D-Pa), chairman of the Subcommittee on Compensation, Health, and Safety, said that under HR 4287 states would be free to administer their own programs concurrently with the federal program as long as they do not conflict with the federal program.

The Senate mine safety bill differs from the House bill in the changes it made to the Coal Act. The Senate bill would tighten the administrative process under the Coal Act for imposing, adjudicating, and collecting penalties for violations. The Senators approved a provision which would allow the Labor Department to shut down mines where a pattern of mine safety and health violations is established.

The Senate bill also would expand wage rate retention for health transfers to include reasons other than black lung. Unlike the House measure, the Senate bill would make the Secretary of Labor, rather than the Secretary of HEW, responsible for rulemaking.

The differences between the House and Senate versions will have to be reconciled by a conference committee and both sides of Congress will have to approve the report of that committee.

Benzene

LOW CHEMICAL DROPS LIMIT TO 10 PARTS PER MILLION

A new corporate standard for occupational exposure to benzene setting a ceiling concentration of 10 parts of benzene per million parts of air was announced July 13 by Dow Chemical U.S.A.

The new ceiling limit, which went into effect immediately, is 15 ppm lower than the current permissible ceiling level set by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. It is higher, however, than the one part per million currently proposed by OSHA for revisions to the standard.

There was "no intention" by the company to make the announcement "close to the opening" of public hearings on a new OSHA benzene standard, Dow corporate medical director Charles Scharnweber asserted. (See related article in this issue.) The decision to lower the ceiling level came after "new findings in a major epidemiological study on benzene workers in our Midland, Mich., production location caused us to reconsider our position on benzene exposure," according to Scharnweber.

Last year, Scharnweber noted, Dow reported that the Midland study had found two cases of leukemia among 594 employees from the Midland plant. Subsequently, a former employee presumed still to have been alive was identified as having died from leukemia in 1965.

Scharnweber cautioned that "information on the third leukemia case is not sufficient to relate to benzene work practices within Dow." The employee "worked only 30 months for Dow" and 17 months in an area where benzene exposure averaged from 0.3 to 14.7 ppm. The Dow official added that the company is trying to trace "28 years of the individual's employment history unknown to us."

Reduction of the benzene ceiling level will be accomplished primarily through work practices controls, a Dow spokesman told OSHA. Generally, he reported,

engineering controls will not be needed to accomplish the reduction.

Beryllium

LIMITED IMPACT ON PRIMARY PRODUCERS FROM PROPOSED RULE FORESEEN BY OSHA

The proposed Occupational Safety and Health Administration standard on beryllium, if issued as a final regulation, would have only "a limited economic effect" on primary beryllium producers, according to a draft environmental impact statement issued by OSHA.

OSHA's proposed standard, issued on October 17, 1975, would reduce the permissible exposure limit for beryllium from two micrograms per cubic meter of air to one microgram. A public hearing on the proposal will begin in Washington, D.C., on August 16 (Current Report, June 9, p. 56).

The only two primary producers of beryllium in operation, Brush-Wellman, Inc., and Kawecki Beryllco Industries, "should be able to support the increased costs" expected to result from issuance of a new beryllium standard, OSHA reported. The agency noted that it based its assertion on a study by Bolt Beranek and Newman, Inc.

Substantial costs would be incurred, however, by immediate beryllium processors such as nonferrous foundries, alloy machiners, ceramic manufacturers, and metal machiners, according to OSHA. As a result, many nonferrous foundries probably no longer would be able to compete with primary producers of the element, "leading to the concentration of beryllium metal production among fewer establishments."

Some 400 employees of immediate processors could lose their jobs as a result of compliance costs and "higher input costs" imposed by a new standard, the impact statement said. It noted, however, that increased production among primary producers due to a reduction in the number of competitors among immediate processors could lead to increased employment in that sector.

No capital expenditures or operating costs would be required of end-users of beryllium, as exposures in this sector are "well below" the proposed one microgram level, OSHA predicted. However, a "potential impact" could occur as a result of price increases by primary producers and intermediate processors.

Prices for beryllium products would increase for the end user, but the increase would have little impact on demand due to a lack of substitutes for beryllium compounds, OSHA reported. Abroad, increases likely would be accepted in the short run, but in the long run could "encourage domestic production by other countries."

No Environmental Impact

The proposed standard, OSHA noted, would require increased use of exhaust ventilation controls, and thus could result in a greater discharge of beryllium-containing dusts, mists, and fumes into the outside environment. There should be no adverse impact on ambient air quality, though, if adequate controls are installed on emissions sources, the impact statement emphasized.

Such controls also would be "economically desirable," the statements commented, because the collected waste would contain material that could be recycled.

Alternative Standards

Examining the possible impacts of alternative standards, the impact statement found that a requirement for the elimination of all detectable beryllium exposure probably