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Plastics Component May Cause Cancer

MIDLAND, Mich. (AP) — Dow Chemical Co. said Tuesday it has reported to federal agencies that a second basic component of plastics may be a cancer agent.

The company said that preliminary reports by the Italian scientist who first identified vinyl chloride as an agent of liver cancer show that vinylidene chloride, used with vinyl chloride in Dow plants to produce a basic plastic resin, has produced cancer in rats.

"I can't emphasize strongly enough that this is a preliminary report and needs confirmation," said Dr. K.V. Rowe, Dow research scientist and toxicologist.

From the basis of the preliminary information, Dow notified the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Environmental Protection Agency, Food and Drug Administration, industrial customers and affected Dow workers.

Dow did not indicate how many workers were involved. Vinylidene chloride is made at Dow plants in Freeport, Tex., and Plaquemine, La., and used for the manufacture of plastic

wrapping paper and other goods at Dow's Midland plant.

Rowe called the report "an alert rather than an established fact." He said Dow scientists now in Italy expect to seek confirmation of the experiments this week.

The study was conducted by Dr. P.L. Viola, a professor of medicine in Rome.

High concentrations of the volatile liquid were exposed to rats. Viola reported development of reticulum cell sarcoma — or cancer developing in intestinal supportive tissue — in the test animals.

"This is a very normally occurring cancer, particularly in the kinds of rats he (Viola) was using," Rowe said.

The cell irregularity is "quite at variance" with angiosarcoma, the rare liver cancer linked with vinyl chloride in the deaths of U.S. chemical industry workers exposed to the gas, Rowe said.

Rowe said Dow researchers have completed six months of a two-year experiment in which rats are exposed to vinylidene chloride. Dow has found no toxic effects as yet, he added.

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