

PVC, chlorine makers urged to prepare for 'sea changes'

The latest prediction for a bleak future for chlorine comes from a consulting service that prepared an economic report for the Chlorine Institute (Washington) earlier this year. Despite industry's economic and scientific arguments, polyvinyl chloride (PVC) packaging and other chlorine uses will be restricted, says Charles River Associates (CRA; Boston) v.p. Ronald Whitfield. Companies must shake their "denial" to prepare for a market change, he says.

CRA's report (*CW*, April 28, p. 12) estimates costs of a chlorine phaseout at \$102 billion annually, plus \$67 billion in capital investment. While chlorine replacement in pharmaceuticals would cost \$53.6 billion, PVC and other uses with lower phaseout costs are in for a "sea change," says Whitfield. His comments at a New York chapter meeting of the American Chemical Society spurred a flurry of calls

from Wall Street analysts to chlorine and PVC makers.

Although it is stable and nontoxic, PVC is a target for phasedown because of organochlorines potentially emitted during its production and destruction. It is also under attack in anti-chlorine initiatives. The International Joint Commission (IJC; Windsor, ON), a U.S.-Canadian organization, proposed virtual elimination of chlorine from the Great Lakes at its last biennial meeting.

MOST VULNERABLE. Top phasedown candidates, says Whitfield, include PVC products and the use of chlorine in pulp bleaching, chlorinated solvents, water disinfection, and agricultural chemicals. PVC packaging—at less than 10% of PVC use—is one of the "most vulnerable, hardest to defend," says CRA senior associate Fran Brown, since relatively cheap substitutes are available. Whitfield predicts the IJC will

propose PVC restrictions at its October meeting.

Whitfield envisions a combination of product bans, taxes, building code changes, labeling, and reporting requirements that could pressure use reductions. "They're not going to be successful" in banning PVC, says Vinyl Institute (Wayne, NJ) executive director Robert Burnett, because the industry will challenge the "artificial environmental concerns."

"Once you educate people," agrees Geon manager of environmental solutions D'Lane Wisner, restrictions will be defeated. Wisner says the industry is pushing recycling and improving PVC's image. He points to the continued presence of once-embattled styrofoam as an example of industry success.

PVC packaging and construction have already come under fire in Europe. The packaging industries in Sweden and Denmark have voluntarily agreed to reduce the amount of PVC in packaging. Switzerland banned PVC in mineral water bottles, but, says Burnett, that is mainly to prevent sales of French mineral water.

ELISABETH KIRSCHNER

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