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SAFETY OF PVC WIRING PRODUCTS AFFIRMED

WAYNE, New Jersey, November 1, 1988 -- Misinformation circulating throughout the telecommunications industry has incorrectly characterized PVC wire and cable products as an unusual fire hazard, states Dr. Roy T. Gottesman, executive director of the Vinyl Institute. "Stories claiming that PVC emits deadly fumes when it burns are distortions of fact and fly in the face of scientific evidence to the contrary," he declares.

"We have seen several instances lately where telecommunications publications have specifically warned readers that PVC coated wire may pose an unusual health and safety hazard due to new NEC (National Electrical Code) requirements," notes Gottesman. "New code requirements will not alter the way currently installed wiring performs, and we have no indication that properly installed and previously code-compliant PVC wire presents any hazard. The real issue is whether the wire -- be it PVC or any other material -- meets the new code requirements.

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"Anyone concerned about this issue should consult local codes for guidance. There is, however, no scientifically substantiated reason to regard PVC wire and cable sheathing and insulation materials as hazardous either to the safety of a building or its occupants."

Gottesman backs up his statements with the results of research conducted by both the Federal Aviation Administration and The Vinyl Institute at independent institutions such as Southwest Research Institute. The Vinyl Institute is a national trade association representing the leading manufacturers of PVC (polyvinyl chloride, or vinyl) and PVC raw materials and additives. One of the organization's key charters is to conduct or sponsor research of significance to the PVC industry. Much work has been done, he states, in the area of combustibility and fire performance.

"For instance, recent testing performed at Southwest Research Institute on behalf of the Federal Aviation Administration has demonstrated that hydrogen chloride -- a combustion product of PVC when it burns -- does not present the lethal health hazard that has been claimed," he says. In those tests, Gottesman explains, baboons, who have respiratory systems much like humans, were exposed to hydrogen chloride levels hundreds of times higher than any ever measured in real-life fires without being incapacitated.

"In reality, it is carbon monoxide that we must blame for fire-related tragedies," he states. "The biggest problem, of course, is that carbon monoxide is produced by virtually every organic material that burns."

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Regarding the alleged spread of fumes attributed to PVC, Gottesman points to additional research conducted at Southwest Research. In these tests, he explains, it was found that hydrogen chloride was quickly adsorbed by nearby porous surfaces such as cement block, ceiling tile and drywall. Unlike other fire gases such as carbon monoxide, he notes, little hydrogen chloride leaves the fire scene to travel to uninvolved portions of the building.

"In addition to these two test programs, which conclusively demonstrate that PVC does not present any unusual health or safety hazards, we know from extensive testing that PVC possesses excellent resistance to ignition, has a very low flame spread rating and a very low rate of heat release," states Gottesman. "Moreover, PVC wire and cable sheathing meets UL specifications and NEC requirements. It is precisely for these reasons that PVC wire and cable products are so widely used and specified. PVC wiring products have been used safely for over 40 years. In that sense, PVC has a longer established performance record than any other wire insulation or sheathing material on the market."

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