

# industry and society

WEEKLY

REPRODUCTION AUTHORIZED

Brussels, 24 September 1974

No 33/74

## CONTENTS

	Page		Page
A Danger for Workers in the Plastics Industry	1	Motor Vehicles	4
Are Europeans Satisfied with their Living Conditions?	2	Agricultural Research	4
Environmental, Health and Consumer Protection Measures	2	Felt-tipped Pens - a Health Hazard	5
Economic Balance Sheet: Inflation and Instability	2	Local Authorities: European Conference	5
Safe Farming	3	1974 Coal Research Programme	6
European Social Fund	4	Environment and the Iron and Steel Industry	6
		Biology and Health Protection	7

### A Danger for Workers in the Plastics Industry

Since 1970 a number of deaths due to cancer of the liver have been noted among workers employed in the industries producing polyvinyl chloride (PVC), an important raw material used in the manufacture of plastic products. At the consumer stage, i.e., where products made of PVC are used (and in this connection the first use that comes to mind is plastic wrapping for food products), the residual dose of toxic material is infinitesimal and presents no danger. The problem is thus mainly

X/536/74-E

This bulletin is published by the

Commission of the European Communities  
Directorate General of Information  
Division for industrial information and consumers  
Rue de la Loi 200  
B-1040 - Brussels - Tel. 3500 40

Further information is available from the Commission's press and information offices in the countries listed on the inside cover.

*The information published in this bulletin covers the European Communities' activities in the fields of industrial development, protection of the environment and consumer welfare. It is therefore not limited to recording Commission decisions or opinions.*

#### PRESS AND INFORMATION OFFICES OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

##### BELGIUM

1040 BRUSSELS  
Rue de la Loi 200  
Tel. 35 00 40

##### DENMARK

1457 COPENHAGEN  
4 Gammeltorv  
Tel. 14 41 40

##### FRANCE

75782 PARIS CEDEX 16  
61, rue des Belles-Feuilles  
Tel. 553 53 26

##### GERMANY

53 BONN  
Zitelmannstraße 22  
Tel. 2380 41

1 BERLIN 31  
Kurfürstendamm 102  
Tel. 886 40 28

##### GREAT BRITAIN

LONDON W8 4QQ  
20, Kensington Palace Gardens  
Tel. 727 8090

##### IRELAND

DUBLIN 2  
41 Fitzwilliam Square  
Tel. 66 223

##### ITALY

00187 ROME  
Via Poli, 29  
Tel. 68 97 22 à 26

##### LUXEMBOURG

LUXEMBOURG  
Centre européen du Kirchberg  
Tel. 479 41

##### NETHERLANDS

THE HAGUE  
29, Lange Voorhout  
Tel. 070-46 93 26

##### SWITZERLAND

1202 GENEVA  
37-39, rue de Vermont  
Tel. 34 97 50

##### UNITED STATES

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20037  
2100 M Street, N.W.  
Suite 707  
Tel. (202) 872-8350

NEW YORK 10017  
277 Park Avenue  
Tel. 371-3804

one of industrial medicine. On 17 and 18 September therefore the European Commission organized a meeting of some 100 medical specialists in the field of occupational diseases for the purpose of summing-up the present state of knowledge as to the toxicity of PVC. Annex 1 gives a brief account of the work of this seminar.

#### Are Europeans Satisfied with their Living Conditions?

By and large the inhabitants of "small" countries of the Community are more satisfied with their living conditions than those of "big" countries. This is one of the main findings of a survey conducted by the European Commission, on "Europe as seen by the Europeans".

See Annex 2 for details.

#### Environmental, Health and Consumer Protection Measures

In the general introduction to its draft budget (see I&S No 32/74) the European Commission outlines the general programme of its activities for 1975. Annex 3 reproduces the section covering measures on environmental, health and consumer protection.

#### Economic Balance Sheet: Inflation and Instability

The rate of increase in consumer prices for 1974 will be between 7% (in Germany) and 19% (in Italy) according to the annual report on the economic situation in the Community, which the Commission has just forwarded to the Council of Ministers. In this report the Commission states that the level of economic activity in the Community remained relatively high in 1974 and that the gross product for the year as a whole should rise by about 2.5% (as compared with 5.6% in 1973).

However, the Commission notes that it has been impossible to slow down inflation, that the rate of price increase has accelerated compared with the previous year, and that the solidarity of the Community is being undermined by serious instability in the various balance of payments. Whereas the Community's balance of current operations showed a surplus of US\$ 1 000 million in 1973, in 1974 it will reveal a deficit of close to US\$ 20 million. Finally the divergent trends, already noted among member countries, are reaching unprecedented levels. In 1975 the Community is certain to be confronted once more with serious problems of economic disequilibrium. Real success in counter-inflation measures and in the progressive absorption of external deficits demands strict coordination at Community level and the active cooperation of all social groups.

#### Safe Farming

In 1969 in Italy, 349 persons were killed when using agricultural tractors; in 1970 in Germany there were 22 030 accidents in the agricultural sector, of which 1 379 were fatal; in 1972 in Great Britain there were 6 212 accidents in the same sector, of which 120 were fatal. These accidents are chiefly due to rapid farm mechanization and the increasingly widespread use of pesticides and insecticides. The Commission is cooperating with Member States, and employers and employees in the agricultural sector in organizing a Community Safety Week in agriculture, between 15 and 22 September. The main theme will be "Safe Farming in Europe". It is hoped that this coordination at Community level will strengthen the measures already taken by Member States individually to ensure the physical safety and health of those working in agriculture. Regulations and Directives have been adopted or are being studied by the Council, for the improvement of the safety for instance by means of the Community Safety Week, beginning 15 September, of agricultural machinery, but it is essential for the users and those around them (12 million people are involved) to be made aware of dangers

which are not always apparent. The Community Safety Week will take place simultaneously in the various Member States, each of which is planning its own programme, adapted to national requirements.

#### European Social Fund

Aid amounting to 77.7 million units of account (1 u.a. = approximately US\$ 1) will be appropriated from the European Social Fund, for retraining workers. 7.1 million units of account will be used to help retrain workers whose employment is affected by the implementation of Community policies (e.g., workers leaving agriculture), for the teaching of new skills to workers in the textile industry and for the handicapped. 70.6 million u.a. will go to projects aimed at remedying an unsatisfactory employment situation in declining industries, or at helping to retrain older workers, women over 35 and young workers.

#### Motor Vehicles

The Council of Ministers of the Community has adopted a Commission proposal for a Directive (see I&S No 7/74) concerning the harmonization of the laws of Member States on exterior projections on motor vehicles.

#### Agricultural Research

The Council of Ministers has just adopted a Regulation intended to provide for the coordination of agricultural research at European level. The Regulation also provides for the gathering of information from the Member States and the preparation and operation of a permanent inventory. This may be made available both to scientists and administrators to enable them to plan their future

programmes with a complete knowledge of what work is being done throughout the Community. There is also provision for the establishment of a Standing Committee on Agricultural Research, which will advise the Commission on the trends and developments in agricultural research and on the utilization of the results. The Commission will propose specific programmes to the Council to be jointly undertaken by scientists in the Member States, aided by Community finance. The Commission services are currently preparing several research programmes, including particularly programmes on improving the production of vegetable protein, beef production, and livestock effluents.

#### Felt-tipped Pens - A Health Hazard

Some Community countries manufacture and sell felt-tipped pens with a high (40 to 50%) formamide content. A major manufacturer of formamide has indicated in its technical sales literature that formamide can have teratogenic effects (i.e., cause malformation of the foetus). The Commission has not yet been notified of any affections or accidents to human beings resulting from the normal use of felt-tipped pens. From the toxicological point of view, therefore, this is not an urgent problem calling for an early decision. However, the subject should be discussed on a scientific basis in order to remove any anxiety that may still persist. The Commission will therefore keep a careful watch on the results of work now in progress, and reserves the right, in the light of these findings, to take such action as lies within its province.

#### Local Authorities: European Conference

At the tenth plenary session of the European Conference of Local Authorities held at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg from 16 to 21 September, the Commission's Director for the Environment and Consumer Protection Service, Mr Carpentier, read a speech on behalf of the Vice-President of the European Commission, Mr Scarascia Mugnozza, which included the statement that there

would be enough work for all of us for several years to come in cleaning up our continent and acquiring better habits for the future. The speech also mentioned that the Commission would go on raising such basic questions as the organization and future of our societies, and would promote discussion on the changes required if we wish to live in closer harmony with each other, and with our own biosphere.

#### 1974 Coal Research Programme

Under the ECSC's 1974 coal research programme, 1.07 million units of account (1 u.a. = approximately US\$ 1) will be allocated to financing research on improving working conditions in mines and increasing efficiency in the coal industry. This sum will be taken from the 7.74 million u.a. available for the 1974 programme, 6 million u.a. of which were already allocated at the beginning of the year.

#### Environment and the Iron and Steel Industry

The Commission organized a teach-in from 24 to 26 September in Luxembourg, on the subject of "The quality of the environment and the iron and steel industry - results and prospects". The main subject dealt with was the results of the research and study projects carried out in this field, with the financial help of the ECSC, as part of the programme it initiated in 1958 (see I&S No 10/74). Further information is available from:

Commission of the European Communities,  
Directorate-General for Social Affairs,  
Secretariat of the Conference,  
"Quality of the environment and the  
iron and steel industry",  
"Results and prospects",  
29 rue Aldringen, Luxembourg  
Tel.: 292-41

Biology and Health Protection

The European Commission has just published its annual report for 1973 on the Biology and Health Protection Programme (see I&S No 29/74). The report is on sale at the Publications Office, European Communities, P.O. Box 1003, Luxembourg.



A Danger for Workers in the Plastics Industry

Since 1970 a number of deaths due to cancer of the liver have been noted among workers employed in the industries producing polyvinyl chloride (PVC), an important raw material used in the manufacture of plastic products. Currently the PVC industry employs 30 000 persons in Europe, is second in plastic materials production and is expanding rapidly at the rate of 10% per annum. In 1973 the Community produced over 3 million tons of PVC, used mostly in the manufacture of tubes and pipes (27% of which of PVC production), electric cables (10%), flooring and building structures (18%), clothing and shoes (9%), wrapping foil and plastic bottles (18%).

PVC is made from a particularly toxic heavy gas, vinyl chloride which during processing must be kept under pressure in an autoclave, a kind of large hermetically sealed "cooker". It was mainly workers responsible for cleaning these vats who succumbed to cancer of the liver (up to the present, there have been 25 deaths, 14 of them in the United States). The toxicity of the product has now been established and there is no doubt about the cause and effect relationship. Since this discovery in 1970, precautions have been taken in the industry to reduce exposure levels considerably (concentrations have been reduced from several thousand to some hundred parts per million (ppm)).

It is in the PVC production industries therefore that workers may be exposed to hazards, whereas in the processing industries (where plastic products are made from PVC), hardly any of the toxic gas is left and there is no risk to workers.

At the consumer stage, i.e., where products made from PVC are used (and the first use that springs to mind is plastic packaging for food products), the residual dose of the toxic gas is no more than a few thousandths of a ppm and therefore presents no problem. PVC toxicity is thus an industrial medicine matter. For this

reason the European Commission arranged a seminar on 17 and 18 September for some hundred medical specialists in occupational diseases. Opening the seminar, Mr Shanks, a Director-General of the European Commission, reminded his listeners that one of the aims of the Community's social policy was to protect workers at their place of work. In the case of workers in PVC factories, the question of prevention was primary, and exposure levels must be defined which did not endanger health. Their strict determination was made all the more imperative since the possible damage to the human organism only became apparent long after exposure (10 years or so).

Following two days of discussion and exchange of information, those taking part in the seminar stressed a number of ideas and principles which should be regarded as guidelines for the action to be taken in this field:

(1) Substitution of a non-toxic product for PVC might be considered eventually but this would mean long delays and lead to serious disruption in industries where PVC is a key-factor.

(2) PVC production must be carried out under improved conditions. The considerable efforts already undertaken by the industries over recent years show the problem to be a technological one, which can be satisfactorily solved although it would appear that no "zero exposure" is practicable.

(3) The concept of a permissible dosage led to controversy between some participants. It is possible, nevertheless, to define an incidence level which is "humanly" perceptible: figures of 10 to 25 ppm were put forward, and one ppm (i.e., zero) was suggested by some participants.

(4) Permanent and extremely strict supervision must be introduced for jobs involving exposure, and the workers concerned must be individually monitored from the biological point of view.

(5) Any information on epidemiology available in various countries, particularly the United States, should be used in determining the parameters which will lead to the best possible medical prevention.

As a result of the seminar's findings, the European Commission will make every effort to encourage the exchange of information, and coordination between specialists in different countries, so that prevention methods may be improved.

Are Europeans Satisfied with their Living Conditions?

By and large the inhabitants of "small" countries of the Community are more satisfied with their living conditions than those of "big" countries. Three quarters of the inhabitants of the nine countries interviewed are very satisfied or, rather, satisfied with their general living conditions. This proportion which is only 73% of the population of the four big countries (Germany, France, Great Britain, and Italy) rises to 92% in the small countries taken together. This results from a survey conducted by the European Communities in September 1973, concerning the degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with living conditions in the Member States of the Community. 13 000 Europeans in the nine countries were interviewed.

Who are the satisfied Europeans?

They can be divided according to:

- (a) The area in which they live
- (b) The political party to which they have the closest affiliation
- (c) Religious beliefs
- (d) Family income
- (e) The vocation of the head of the family.

It should be noted that age, level of education and sex are of little or no influence.

The most "contented" regions (with percentages of 95 to 100) are six Dutch provinces (out of 10) - Drenthe, Utrecht, Overijssel, Noordbrabant, Gelderland, Zeeland; 3 (out of 7) Danish provinces: Fyn, Sydjylland, Vestjylland, and 2 (out of 9) Dutch-speaking provinces of Belgium: West-Vlaanderen and Limburg; in other words 3.5% of the entire Community population. The 11 least-contented areas include 5 Italian provinces: the North-East, the North-West, the Centre,

Sicily and Sardinia South; 4 (out of 7) French provinces: the Paris Basin, the South-East, the South-West, the Paris region; 1 German province: the Saar, and 1 British region: the North-West, in other words 38% of the whole Community.

One result noted is that in almost all countries people with left-wing sympathies are often less satisfied than those with right-wing sympathies.

As for religion, in every country those practising religion tend more often to be contented than those who do not practise any.

Generally speaking, people with high incomes are more satisfied with their living conditions than others, but the relationship between income and degree of satisfaction is not that simple. For instance, level of income has a greater influence on the degree of satisfaction in big countries, particularly in France and Italy, than in small countries, though Belgium is an exception.

The percentage of workers satisfied (vocation of the head of family) is below the average national percentage, except in Belgium and the Netherlands. Compared with the national average, farmers are relatively discontented in Germany and the Netherlands.

In addition, in France and Luxembourg the social structure and the way in which democracy operates have an important influence on the general degree of satisfaction. In these two countries there is a very close connection between political affiliation and personal satisfaction.

Past experience plays a far greater role in determining the degree of satisfaction than future expectations, i.e., a general feeling of contentment is much more closely linked to improvement already experienced, than to any expectation of improvement to come.

Finally, it can be seen, in the Community as a whole, a slightly greater pro-European attitude is noticeable among people who tend to be satisfied, than amongst those tending to be discontented.

Environmental, Health and Consumer Protection Measures

Since the Council's adoption of the Environment Programme, and the Council Resolution on the Social Action Programme (21 January 1974 - see I&S No 185), the Commission's work on those fields has been progressing on various complementary levels:

- (1) The coordination and pursuit of recognized activities, required by the Euratom Treaty, for the protection of the health and safety of the general public and workers against the dangers resulting from ionizing radiation.
- (2) A systematic approach, horizontal rather than sectoral, to the definition and assessment of the relative importance of the various problems connected with the environment and with health and safety (e.g., objective evaluation of the risks arising from certain pollutants in the atmosphere, in water and in the soil, including noise pollution), essentially through studies and consultations.

The continuation of this course of action leads logically to the common introduction of standards, to intra-Community harmonization of sampling and measuring methods, and to the standardization of pollution monitoring installations.

- (3) The detailed planning and gradual implementation of a series of further initiatives planned under the Environment and Social Action Programmes, including the submission of a programme on hygiene, industrial safety and workers' health, and the coordination of new measures (dealing with aspects of health or environmental problems) proposed under policies in the various sectors.

Among these various types of operations planned for 1975, the following should be noted:

- (a) under social and environmental policy, establishment of an institute for directed research, the Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, which would be subsidized from the Community budget. A proposal to set up this Foundation was forwarded to the Council by the Commission in December 1973 (see IRT No 213).

Financially, it is by far the most important new measure under environmental and health measures, and is justified both by the urgency of the problems which the Foundation will be dealing with and by the savings which a scientific approach to their solution should bring about in the longer term;

(b) under the first Environment Programme, a second new measure with a lesser budgetary impact: action to alert the general public to environmental problems;

(c) under the programme on hygiene, industrial safety and workers' health, if the procedures move fast enough: the setting-up of a permanent documentation and information centre on research in the Member States in the field of industrial safety, hygiene and medicine.

In addition, 1975 will witness the preparation and submission of the second Environment Programme.

#### Protection of the Interests of Consumers

The Council had undertaken to take a decision on the proposal for the preliminary consumers' protection programme in 1974 and it should begin to take effect in 1975. Preparatory studies will be made on such matters as the effectiveness of consumer protection legislation regarding foodstuffs, and possibilities for improving labelling, and discussions will continue with the consumers' organizations (particularly within the Consumers Advisory Committee - CAC) and the international organizations concerned. The Commission will continue to help these bodies to strengthen their structure at European level, to organize consultations with consumers, to deliver detailed opinions and to take part in drawing up directives.