

Enclosed buildings should not be used to house heavy fraction pumps or other equipment associated with possible PAH emissions, the report stated. If such buildings are used, they should be provided with a suitable mechanical ventilation system, it added.

Operators should be trained regarding the possible health hazards of certain operations, and the best way to perform these activities to minimize exposure, according to the report. In the collection of process stream samples, for example, operators should be instructed to stand upwind of the sampling port and to use the proper clothing and equipment.

Good personal hygiene is particularly important to coke handlers because of the probability that they will have skin contact with coke, the report stated. Also, because problems related to coke-cutting/handling operations are "not uncommon," coke handlers should be instructed to deal with these situations in a way which minimizes exposure. Such problems include leaking drum bottoms during coke formation, and difficulty in removing drum bottoms because of adhesion to the coke.

The report also suggested that coke-cutting/handling operations be enclosed as much as possible, including tight enclosures around drilling shafts and chute extenders at the bottoms of the drums.

Copies of the report, "Petroleum Refinery Workers' Exposure to PAHs at Fluid Catalytic Cracker, Coker, and Asphalt Processing Units" (NIOSH Publication No. 83-111), are available from NIOSH Publications Dissemination, Robert A. Taft Laboratories, 4676 Columbia Parkway, Cincinnati, Ohio 45226.

Virgin Islands

CHANGE OF STATE PLAN HEARING LOCATION CORRECTED BY AGENCY IN NEW ANNOUNCEMENT

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration June 10 issued a notice changing the location of the informal public hearing on whether to grant final approval to the Virgin Islands workplace safety and health plan (48 FR 26836).

The informal public hearing now is scheduled to be held at 9:30 a.m. on June 29 in the Conference Room of the Virgin Islands Legislature, Veteran's Drive, Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, V.I.

In its notice last month, the agency said that a final determination on the granting of federal approval to the state plan will be made following a written comment period and a public meeting (Current Report, May 12, p. 1062).

The Virgin Island program is the first operated by a state or territory to become eligible for final OSHA approval, and if approved, will exempt the islands from federal job safety and health regulations and enforcement jurisdiction in certain areas.

However, since that time, OSHA said, a change has occurred in the availability of the announced hearing room, and as a result, it "has relocated the public hearing but has retained the same date, June 29, 1983."

Persons wishing to testify at the hearing who have not yet submitted a notice of intention to appear should call Tom Hall, OSHA Office of Consumer Affairs, at (202) 523-8024, the notice advised.

For further information, contact James Foster, Director, Office of Information and Consumer Affairs, OSHA, U.S. Department of Labor, Room N-3637, 200 Constitution Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20210; tel. (202) 523-8148.

Display Terminals

DANGERS FROM VIDEO DISPLAY TERMINALS QUESTIONED BY BIRTH DEFECTS FOUNDATION

Allegations that radiation emissions from video display terminals may be causing miscarriages or birth defects among female VDT operators were questioned June 10 by officials of the March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation.

Noting that since 1980 there have been several reports of workers who operated or worked near VDTs during pregnancy and then had a high rate of miscarriages, malformed babies, or both, Dr. Arthur J. Salisbury, March of Dimes vice president for medical services, said: "There are so many women of childbearing age who work at or near VDTs today that some coincidental VDT-linked clusters of problem pregnancies are to be expected."

A cluster of birth defects is more likely to reflect a specific cause if the birth defects are alike, but this has not been true of reported VDT-linked cases. Equally important, the alleged VDT-linked birth defects have not resembled the kinds of fetal damage that any type of radiation is known to cause, the Foundation declared.

The organization noted that the question of VDT radiation has been studied and tested extensively by the Food and Drug Administration's Bureau of Radiological Health, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, and the Canadian Radiation Protection Bureau. All of these organizations have reported no detectable radiation hazard to any aspect of human health.

There is general agreement that prolonged operation of VDTs can cause eyestrain and neck, shoulder, or back pain, but these discomforts have no known effect on the outcome of pregnancy, Salisbury stated.

Health Hazards

PSYCHOGENIC ILLNESS SEEN BY NIOSH IN NAUSEA, HEADACHES AT COMPONENTS PLANT

An outbreak of illness that occurred over a one-month period at an electronic components manufacturing plant in Pennsylvania probably was due to psychogenic causes, according to an investigation by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

NIOSH reached that conclusion after considering the "poorly defined nature of the employees' illness," and finding that potential toxic chemicals either were not present at the plant, or were "well within" current standards, a report published in the June 10 *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* stated.

The situation began in April 1982, when three of some 220 employees at the plant experienced nausea and headaches, and complained of disorientation. The company suspected a defect in the air conditioning system, which had recently been turned on, but an examination found no refrigerant leaks, NIOSH reported.

Subsequently, diesel fumes accidentally entered the plant's production area from a testing chamber, and employees unaware of the source of the fumes feared that they were being exposed to toxic chemicals, the study said. During May, the plant was closed twice after six illnesses occurred. In all, workers from the facility made 30 trips to a local hospital emergency room during the one-month period.

Both NIOSH and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration were consulted, and "extensive environmen-

tal investigations" by OSHA and private consultants failed to detect any ventilation deficiencies, or toxic concentrations of any chemicals, the institute remarked. Carbon monoxide, toluene, trichloroethylene, and ethyl acetate levels were within permissible limits, and no detectable amounts of other substances such as lead, formaldehyde, sewer gas, or air conditioning refrigerant were found.

Suspecting the possibility of a psychogenic factor in the illnesses, NIOSH administered a questionnaire to 213 employees. More ill than well employees complained of "bothersome odors," discounted the role of psychological factors in the outbreak, and believed the illness was likely to recur, the institute found. Medical records from the emergency room "provided no objective evidence of chemical toxicity."

NIOSH remarked that the accidental release of diesel fumes "may have contributed to a heightened awareness of various odors in the plant." Since the air conditioning was restarted last June, no unusual incidence of illness has been reported at the plant, the report said.

California

CAL/OSHA, HIGHWAY PATROL EXERCISE CONCURRENT POWER OVER CEMENT TRUCKS

SAN FRANCISCO — (By a BNA Staff Correspondent) — The California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH) and the California Highway Patrol (CHP) exercise concurrent safety jurisdiction over concrete transit mixers, the state Occupational Safety and Health Appeals Board ruled.

"A motor vehicle, such as a cement transit mixer, when operated on a public road or off the road, at say, a construction site, is undeniably a 'place of employment' subject to the rules and regulations of Cal/OSHA," the board said.

The case involved *Sequoia Rock Company, Visalia* (Docket No. 1083-76), which was cited by DOSH in 1976 for exposing employees to unguarded sprockets, rollers, and shafts on a cement mixer truck. The company appealed the citations, but in a 1977 decision, an administrative law judge denied the appeals. Thereafter, Sequoia petitioned the full board to reconsider the law judge's decision, claiming the CHP has jurisdiction over motor vehicles.

After reconsideration, the board rejected Sequoia's contentions, ruling that DOSH and the CHP have concurrent jurisdiction. It noted that the state Vehicle Code empowers the CHP to prescribe uniform rules for motor vehicles for the entire state but it does not bar state or local agencies from enacting their own rules so long as they are consistent with the CHP's.

DOSH has specific legislative authority over the safety and health of employees in workplaces, the board observed.

Finding that the cement mixer truck could be a place of employment, it asserted DOSH's concurrent jurisdiction with the CHP. "The division can act to protect employees against the hazards of unguarded rollers, shafts, and sprockets on motor vehicles until such time as the CHP enacts and actively enforces rules and regulations relating to rollers, shafts, and sprockets inconsistent with those of Cal/OSHA," the board concluded.

Noise

GROUP CHARGES 'ABUSE' OF PROCEDURAL LAW IN CHANGES TO HEARING CONSERVATION RULES

Notice-and-comment requirements of the Administrative Procedure Act were "abused" when the Reagan Administration delayed the effective date of workplace hearing conservation rules developed under the Carter Administration, and then issued portions of the rules, with changes, without first providing an opportunity for public comment, a coalition of public interest groups charged June 7.

The action on the hearing conservation regulation was one of several instances in which the Reagan Administration has "opted to exclude the public from commenting on its regulatory initiatives," according to Alliance for Justice, an association composed of the Environmental Defense Fund, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, and 17 other public interest groups.

Originally issued by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration in January 1981, during President Carter's final week in office, the hearing conservation rules were scheduled to take effect April 15, 1981. That date was delayed three times before portions of the regulation were issued in August 1981, at which time OSHA asked for public comment on whether the provisions still subject to administrative stay were necessary (Current Report, Aug. 27, 1981, p. 243).

"No comments were permitted on the changes or on the continued delay," the public interest organization charged. It further contended that the issuance of only certain provisions "seriously undermined the effectiveness of the regulations."

OSHA's own explanation, when it announced the deferrals, was that the delays were necessary to give agency staff adequate time to study requests by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and other petitioners for an administrative stay of the rules. The agency also stated that an opportunity for public comment was not needed, in view of the short duration of each deferral (Current Report, April 16, 1981, p. 1425; June 4, 1981, p. 3).

An OSHA spokeswoman told BNA June 8 that the agency had no comment on the organization's remarks.