



of the workplace improvements for VDT operators could be made at minimal cost. The improvements, to alleviate eye strain, back problems, and stress — problems alleged by several state workers who testified before the committee — include changes in office furniture and lighting, Fleishman reported.

In other remarks, she emphasized that little is known about the long-term effects of VDTs, and warned legislators not to accept claims from manufacturers that radiation levels are insignificant. "Maybe the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health instruments are not sensitive enough to monitor low levels of radiation," she said.

A background report prepared for the hearing by the General Assembly's Office of Legislative Research said a November 1979 NIOSH investigation found that VDTs tested emitted radiation "well below current occupational exposure standards."

"If radiation is not a problem, why are there so many symptoms reported?" Fleishman asked the legislators.

These symptoms, the subject of worker complaints for several years, were outlined to the committee by Betty L. Tianti, secretary-treasurer of the Connecticut State Labor Council, AFL-CIO. "Long-term effects will take years to obtain and analyze, but short-term effects are already well documented," she stated. They include eye strain; headache; short-term loss of visual acuity and changes in color perception; back, neck, and shoulder pain; fatigue; stomach ache and vomiting; and postural problems and musculoskeletal problems aggravated by poor lighting, uncomfortable or mismatched chairs, desks, and keyboard heights, lack of workspace, and poorly suited work environment, she asserted.

Regulatory Action Urged

The German, Swiss, Norwegian, and Canadian governments have conducted research that has resulted in regulatory changes and pending regulatory changes governing the use of VDTs in those countries, Tianti commented. Additional research by the industry, trade associations, and affiliated unions of the Connecticut AFL-CIO "demonstrates the extent of the problems," she maintained.

The state labor organization "urges the General Assembly to follow the lead of Sweden, Norway, and Germany," she said. Recommendations by the federation included these:

- ▶ Work at VDTs should be limited to no more than 50 percent of the workday.
- ▶ Employers should adopt NIOSH recommendations for rest breaks — 15 minutes for every two hours of moderately demanding VDT work, and 15 minutes for each hour of visually intense, high workload, or repetitive VDT work.
- ▶ Adjustable screens and keyboards, which alleviate back and muscle strain, should be required as standard equipment.
- ▶ Glare-reducing glass or screens should be required to reduce eyestrain and headache.
- ▶ Contrast and brightness controls should be required as standard equipment.

Other recommendations pertained to worker health examinations prior to beginning VDT work, VDT hazard disclosure by employees, and giving pregnant women the option of performing non-VDT work during pregnancies.

Manufacturers See No Radiation Risk

Vico Henriques, president of the Computer and Business Equipment Manufacturers Association, told the legislative panel that there is no danger from radiation emitted by VDTs.

He cited several research projects he said were carried out or sponsored by the federal government with the cooperation of labor unions and industry. They proved conclusively, he declared, that there is no danger to employees from the low levels of radiation emitted by the terminals. These include studies by NIOSH and the Food and Drug Administration. He added that all VDTs used in the U.S. must follow safety standards issued by the Federal Communications Commission.

Manufacturers are constantly studying the health effects of VDTs, including those problems alleged by workers, and have found the units safe, Henriques and other industry representatives told the committee.

Legislators on the committee repeatedly asked industry and union representatives whether they knew of any workers' compensation cases pending on VDT complaints, and none said they were aware of any.

Skelley termed the hearing "informational." Committee staff employees said they expect other hearings, but none have been scheduled yet.

Grain Elevators

PROGRAM ON PREVENTING EXPLOSIONS MADE AVAILABLE THROUGH OSHA OFFICES

An employee training program describing methods to prevent explosions in grain handling facilities is available from certain Occupational Safety and Health Administration local offices, OSHA announced Oct. 5.

The training program was developed by the Grain Elevator and Processing Society's Grain Industry Safety and Health Center with funds under an OSHA New Directions training and education grant. In addition to being available for short-term loans from the agency, the training program also may be purchased or rented from the society.

The society's training package consists of a comprehensive instructor's manual; a 15-minute color slide/tape show; handout materials for employees; and suggested guidelines or forms for recording maintenance checks, operating a "hot work" permit system for such tasks as welding, a regular dust cleanup schedule, and emergency procedures in the event of fire or explosion.

Assistant Labor Secretary Thorne G. Auchter said that OSHA had purchased copies of the training program to make them available on a loan basis because "we believe widespread use of this program, coupled with workplace safety programs implementing the measures it recommends, should increase protection for workers throughout the grain handling industry."

OSHA is currently in the process of developing a safety standard to address the unique hazards present in grain handling facilities, and has circulated copies of a draft proposal for informal comments from industry, union, and public representatives (Current Report, Sept. 16, p. 327). Agency officials have said that they expect to issue a proposed standard on grain elevators by January 1983.

"Preventing Grain Dust Explosions: An Introduction" can be purchased for \$150 per copy or may be rented for \$35 for 30 days or \$50 for 50 days from GEAPS, Grain Industry Safety and Health Center, P.O. Box 15024, Commerce Station, Minneapolis, Minn. 55415.

For specific information on which OSHA offices have the training package available for a short-term loan, contact the OSHA Office of Information, Room N-3637, U.S. Department of Labor, 200 Constitution Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20210; tel. (202) 523-8615.