

Vinyl Chloride, Cancer, and Technology

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Shelby Hall: Room TBA
The University of Alabama
Tuscaloosa, AL 35401

Poly(vinyl chloride) or “vinyl” is one of the four main commodity polymers manufactured in the US. Last year over 15 billion pounds were made in the US; however, there was a time in the 1970s when many doubted that the industry would exist at all in 1980, let alone 2004. It was in those days that the raw material, vinyl chloride, was found to cause cancer in laboratory animals, then in humans--specifically, four workers in polymerization operations.

This presentation reviews the history of vinyl chloride toxicology, the events of 1974 and 1975 when cancer cases in workers were confirmed and how this situation became one of the landmark events in the history of industrial hygiene. Most important is what was done by chemists and engineers in the US and abroad to modify technology and reinvent the product and the industry along the way.