

Health and Safety

Formaldehyde Hazard at Pall Trinity?

by Carl Feuer, TCLC
Robin Whittlesey, TCLC

Is there a safety problem with formaldehyde at Pall Trinity in Cortland? This is a question that workers, members of UAW Local 1326, are asking.

Formaldehyde is a fact of life for workers, most of whom are women, in Pall Trinity's Filter Department. Always has been. It used to be in much heavier use, before the company moved parts of the operation to Puerto Rico. Now it's just used for a few hours at a time, as part of the corrugating process for making paper filters. But when it is used, the fumes can be intense.

Formaldehyde is dangerous stuff. First of all, it's a carcinogen, shown to cause respiratory and lung cancer. Safe exposure

that no worker is exposed to a dangerous level of formaldehyde. The exposure limits are stringent: no more than 1 ppm formaldehyde (one part formaldehyde per million parts of air) averaged over an eight-hour work day, and no more than 2 ppm during any fifteen minute period. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) recommends an even lower short term exposure limit—0.1 ppm.

It's this short-term exposure limit that is relevant to Pall Trinity, where workers are exposed to formaldehyde for periods up to two hours, not usually for a full day. Sometimes the fumes can get really bad during these times. Do they exceed the NIOSH or OSHA limits?

OSHA specifies strict guidelines for monitoring worker exposures. Although formaldehyde testing has occurred at Pall Trinity, the tests performed did not meet OSHA specifications, which require testing to follow strict procedures, cover long periods of time, and take place under the worst possible conditions. Workers have yet to see the results of even the limited tests that were performed.

Where a formaldehyde problem is indicated, either by air testing or workers' symptoms, the employer must not only bring exposures into compliance with OSHA, but also provide medical surveillance for workers. Appropriate measures include periodic physical exams, lab tests, and counseling—none of which have been provided at Pall Trinity.

All workers have the right to a safe workplace. The possibility of hazardous levels of formaldehyde in the Filter Department raises important questions about health and safety at Pall Trinity.

The tests performed did not meet OSHA specifications.

Levels are not known for any carcinogen, formaldehyde included.

Persons exposed to formaldehyde may also develop an asthma-like allergy, with wheezing, coughing, and/or chest tightness. Formaldehyde also irritates—and may possibly damage—the skin, eyes, nose, and throat.

Respiratory and skin problems are common among the workers, past and present, in the Filter Department. There has been at least one cancer case and one throat operation.

Because formaldehyde is so dangerous, OSHA recently issued extensive regulations governing its use. Under these regulations, management is required to insure



First Line Union Health and

Who is your health and safety committee? I don't know who it is, or if you or don't know much about it, y

Health and safety is no miracle. Each Year:

- 11,000 workers are killed in
- 70,000 are permanently disabled
- 100,000 die from occupational
- 5 million are injured seriously
- 9 million are exposed to
- At least 14 million are exposed to damage to hearing.

Union Health and Safety Committee against disease and injury on the job can no more rely on management workplace, than we can expect pressure and hard bargaining.

Nor can we rely on the government health and safety regulations weaker. OSHA has neither the job on its own. This is one reason to take one example, are two construction workers in Europe.

Both management and OSHA safety seriously. Pushed hard. Safety Committee comes in.

The health and safety committee ideally with each shift and each unsafe and unhealthy condition.

Formaldehyde

If you work with it, you should know the hazards
and you should know your rights

Contact the Labor Coalition at 277-5670
for more information