EPA Announces National Strategy for Toxic Air Pollutants

[ EPA press release - June 4, 1985 ]

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lee M. Thomas today announced a national strategy to reduce the risks from toxic air pollutants.

At the same time, EPA announced regulatory decisions on five chemicals that have been extensively examined as candidates for federal regulation under the hazardous air pollution control provisions of the Clean Air Act.

"EPA believes that air toxics are a serious problem," Thomas said, "but we believe they can be dealt with in a responsible and effective manner. The strategy we are announcing today builds on significant efforts already undertaken to control releases of toxic chemicals into the nation's air."

EPA's strategy for controlling the air toxics problem calls for:

- Expanding the focus of the national air toxics control program from solely regulating individual pollutants to also regulating multiple pollutants from different source categories.

- Expanding the program to reduce risks in specific communities with air toxics problems.

- Increasing federal support of state air toxic programs so that states can improve their capability to deal with air toxics within their borders.

- Improving emergency preparedness and response for sudden, accidental releases at all levels of government.

- Beginning new efforts that will give the public the information they need to prevent, prepare for and respond to toxic accidents.

"EPA's efforts to control the nation's air toxics problem, both from routine releases and sudden, accidental releases, represent a major national investment, one from which the public deserves real and lasting results," Thomas said. "What is required is an approach that addresses both large chemical plants as well as many important small sources of air toxics in our communities. EPA believes that a strong federal, state and local partnership is the best way to deal with a problem in which sources of pollution are frequently so diverse and the solutions are often site specific."

EPA's strategy specifically calls for:
EXPANDING THE FOCUS OF THE NATIONAL AIR TOXICS CONTROL PROGRAM FROM SOLELY REGULATING INDIVIDUAL POLLUTANTS TO ALSO REGULATING MULTIPLE POLLUTANTS FROM DIFFERENT SOURCE CATEGORIES

Along with focusing on emissions of single pollutants from major industrial point sources, EPA also will evaluate air toxics problems by source category. The strategy calls for EPA to reduce public exposure by targeting widespread sources--such as degreasing operations, motor vehicles and fuels, and small combustion sources--and from hazardous waste treatment, storage, and disposal facilities and publicly owned sewage treatment works, all of which the agency believes are the major sources of toxic air pollution. EPA also will consider other source categories that may require control and, to the extent possible, evaluate entire emission streams--as EPA recently did with coke oven emissions--rather than isolated chemical constituents.

To control toxic emissions from mobile sources, EPA has set standards for lead in gasoline, evaporative hydrocarbons from trucks, and particulate emissions from cars and trucks. It also in considering a total ban on lead in gasoline and will propose standards for fuel volatility, diesel fuel quality. The agency also may propose health-effects testing of fuel and fuel additives. It will propose standards for methanol-fueled vehicles and will decide on controls of vehicle refueling.

Under today's announce strategy, the agency will regulate source categories of multiple pollutants under New Source Performance Standards, including the synthetic organic chemicals industry and residential woodstoves. New woodstoves, for instance, would have to be designed and manufactured to meet specific clean air standards. EPA also is considering the need for national regulation of gasoline distribution and sales to reduce volatile organics emissions during automobile refueling. These regulations could require that gasoline vapor controls be placed on gas pumps or the placement of a vapor canister on new automobiles to capture those emissions.

Parts of the strategy are based on regulations or activities already in place to reduce exposure to toxic air pollutants. Studies have shown that a great deal has already been done through the control of conventional pollutants by the National Ambient Air Quality Standards and the effort invested in the National Emissions Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants and the New Source Performance Standards to control routine toxic emissions.

Control of conventional pollutants, for example, has reduced by more than half the number of cancer cases caused by exposures to certain air toxics from 1970 to 1980, according to an EPA air toxics study.

The air toxic study concludes that such conventional controls appear to account for a greater reduction in ambient levels of air toxics than standards written specifically to control the toxic pollutants studied.

Late in 1983, EPA made a commitment to complete its review of 20 to 25 individual chemicals and to make regulatory decisions by the end of this year under Section 112 of the Clean Air Act.

Today, EPA is announcing its intention to list chromium as a hazardous air pollutant, an action which could lead to regulations for the national control of chromium emissions.
The agency also is announcing its decision not to regulate methyl chloroform, a solvent used as a degreasing agent; epichlorohydrin, a constituent of epoxy resins and used in such products as paints, varnishes and shellacs; and chlorofluorocarbon-113 (CFC-113), a degreasing and dry cleaning agent, as specified air pollutants under the Clean Air Act.

EPA's decisions not to list specific pollutants as hazardous air pollutants do not prevent any state or local air pollution control agency from regulating them.

EXPANDING THE PROGRAM TO REDUCE RISKS IN SPECIFIC COMMUNITIES WITH AIR TOXICS PROBLEMS

EPA will expand its program to devise air toxics regulations tailored to the particular air toxics problems of individual communities. It will identify those areas most likely to benefit from site-specific approaches, and, in conjunction with states and local governments in those areas, it will design comprehensive, integrated control approaches which take risk and cost considerations into account.

EPA already has begun such work with officials in Philadelphia and Baltimore and will expand that work over the next year and a half in metals and particulates. The work there will be completed in six months.

The Baltimore effort includes developing strategies for protecting health and dealing with ecological and other effects of air pollution, such as visibility and damage to materials. EPA will work with state and local officials on the Baltimore project over the next 18 months.

A third project will examine toxic releases into the environment of a major metropolitan area and the effect of these releases on human health and the environment. The project is expected to take two and a half years and lead to the identification of cost-effective controls to reduce any environmental risk.

EPA is also working with six state governments to apply this site-specific, risk-based analysis to toxics problems on a state-wide basis. These efforts, like the three site-specific projects, will serve as a model for other states and localities.

INCREASING FEDERAL SUPPORT OF STATE AIR TOXICS PROGRAMS SO THAT STATES CAN IMPROVE THEIR CAPABILITY TO DEAL WITH AIR TOXICS WITHIN THEIR BORDERS

Because local problems may best be evaluated and controlled by state and local air pollution agencies, EPA is devoting funds to assist state air toxic control programs, developing a model state air toxics program as a guide and creating an Air Toxics Information Clearinghouse to exchange information more easily. Twenty-two state and local governments now have air toxics control programs under way.

EPA also will begin a federal, state, and local program to evaluate and, if appropriate, regulate large point sources not appropriate for national regulation because they affect limited areas. Under the strategy, states are deemed to be in a better position to deal with such small areas of high risk caused by individual plants or sources. EPA will set criteria to identify pollutants that will be referred to states for appropriate action. By the end of this year, EPA will identify the first group of pollutants by source categories to be referred to the
states and will make available financial support and extensive technical guidance on all aspects of the referred pollutants. EPA will also audit state activities in the program, provide public information, and monitor the states to make sure their responses are vigorous and consistent.

Under this approach, for example, EPA will not designate acrylonitrile as a toxic pollutant under the Clean Air Act. Instead, it will continue a pilot program that cooperates with 14 states and one local agency to evaluate sources of acrylonitrile emissions. Acrylonitrile is an organic chemical used as a raw material in the manufacture of plastics and synthetic fibers.

**IMPROVING EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE FOR SUDDEN, ACCIDENTAL RELEASES**

EPA's air toxics strategy calls for expanding emergency preparedness, and response programs at all levels of government. The tragedy at Bhopal, India, last December focused national attention on episodic releases of hazardous substances to the air and the resulting health consequences for the communities surrounding the source of the accident. EPA will take several steps to build on the existing framework of local, state, private and federal programs. Because emergency preparedness and response begins at the local level--where the initial reaction to an incident takes place--EPA will help state and local governments improve their capabilities by providing them with assistance in contingency planning, developing and review; expanded training; exercise of contingency plans through simulations; and identification of chemicals (which can aid in developing prevention and mitigation procedures).

EPA also is strengthening its Reportable Quantities regulations under the Superfund law. This provisions applies to those who fail to report toxic releases. Reportable quantity levels have been set for approximately 700 substances.

Similarly, under the Toxic Substances Control Act, EPA is stepping up implementation and enforcement of its programs that require manufacturers, processors, and distributors of a wide variety of chemicals to maintain records of significant adverse reactions to chemicals, as well as requiring manufacturers, processors, importers and distributors to notify EPA when they learn that a chemical substance or mixture may present a substantial risk of injury to health or damage to the environment.

**BEGINNING NEW EFFORTS TO GIVE THE PUBLIC NEEDED INFORMATION TO PREVENT, PREPARE FOR, AND RESPOND TO TOXIC ACCIDENTS**

Shortly after the accident in Bhopal, EPA began developing a list of those chemicals that could result in serious acute exposures threatening human life and health. EPA's new list will include those chemicals for which special attention is warranted because of their hazard potential under extreme circumstances. EPA will consider all existing lists of toxic chemicals, including the list recently developed in response to a Congressional survey of chemical manufacturers. When the list is completed later this summer, EPA will provide it to state and local governments, industry, public interest groups, and emergency and medical officials. The agency will develop and provide guidance on how to use the list to state and local officials and organizations. The guidance will serve as a focal point for contingency planning, and EPA will supplement the written guidance with workshops, training programs, and technical assistance.
In addition, EPA will support a community "Right to Know" program that encourages chemical firms to disclose certain information to communities about hazardous substances on their facilities. The program would give communities access to relevant information on chemicals manufactured or used within their jurisdiction and serve as a basis for realistic emergency planning.