

Firm cited for 62 violations; \$330,000 in fines proposed

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Fines totaling \$330,000 have been proposed against Formosa Plastics Corp. for violations that protect workers' health and safety at its Point Comfort plant.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration cited the company for 62 violations, including three described by the agency as "serious" and "willful."

The proposed penalties stem from a health inspection and safety review conducted by the agency following a release of hydrogen chloride last July.

"Formosa management showed a serious disregard for worker safety," said Gilbert Saulter, OSHA's regional administrator in Dallas. "The company stopped monitoring for levels of vinyl chloride last April, putting workers at risk of overexposure to this hazardous chemical."

The other two violations described as serious and willful in-

cluded pressure vessels not built to meet minimum standards.

Formosa also allegedly violated standards for the handling of hazardous materials, including procedures which govern the use of shutoff valves so that hazardous materials can be directed away from critical areas during start up or maintenance.

In addition, there were serious violations of safety standards for walking surfaces, exits, procedures with flammable liquids, use of personal protective equipment and communications to workers about hazardous materials, he said.

The agency defines a willful violation as one committed with an intentional disregard or indifference to the requirements of the OSHA Act.

A serious violation is defined as one in which "there is substantial probability that death or serious physical harm could result, and the employer knew or should have known of the hazard."

A spokesman for Formosa responded late Tuesday that the company has not had a lost time accident in more than a year and that the company has already corrected or begun correcting the problems noted by OSHA.

"We all take our safety very seriously," said Jay Su, Formosa's plant manager at Point Comfort. "We try to provide our employees a safe working environment ... so any infractions or shortcomings are disappointing to all of us."

Formosa disagrees "vigorously" with the OSHA statement that the company put its workers at risk of overexposure to hydrogen chloride when the company stopped monitoring for levels of vinyl chloride last April, he said.

Su acknowledged that personal testing for overexposure was delayed while the company was searching for a better testing system. "The new system is undergoing evaluation in our plant right now."