FTC to Limit Use Of Plastic Insulation

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Associated Press

The Federal Trade Commission has unanimously agreed to limit the use of popular plastic foam insulators that produce highly poisonous fumes when heated, informed sources said yesterday.

The plastics have been used for insulation in high-rise buildings, airplane interiors and in the trouble-plagued Skylab.

Traces of poisons produced when the foams burn have been found in the bloodstreams of persons killed in airplane accidents although poisoning never has been listed as the cause of death.

The most recent publicity given the products came when the Skylab space station overheated. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration said tests showed the plastics inside Skylab probably had emitted a variety of poisonous gases.

No details were immediately available on what specific plastics were involved in the FTC limitation or what curbs would be placed on their use.

But one source close to the FTC said the commission investigation centered on polyurethane, polystyrene and the cellular plastics.

An FTC spokesman declined to comment on the report that limits had been set but said, "there is an ongoing program in this area."

The Federal Aviation Administration long has been aware that certain plastics used in airplanes can produce toxic fumes when heated.

Tests were made on the bodies of persons killed in the Dec. 8, 1972, plane crash in Chicago that took the life of Mrs. E. Howard Hunt, wife of the convicted Watergate defendant, and 42 others.

Autopsies showed traces of cyanide in seven of the bodies, including the captain's. No cyanide or any other poison was detected in Mrs. Hunt's body, according to the National Transportation Safety Board.

[The NTSB says it will look into allegations by Sherman Skolnick, a Chicago legal researcher, that the Dec. 8 crash was caused by sabotage as part of the cover-up in the Watergate scandal. Mrs. Hunt was carrying $10,000 in $100 bills on the jet that crashed.]

A spokesman for the board emphasized that the plastics themselves do not produce cyanide but that the toxic smoke they produce causes a chemical reaction in the bloodstream that produces cyanide.