Plant Extracts Industrial Chemicals From Natural Gas

By Edward S Kitch

TUSCOLA, Ill., Jan. 2 (P)—A new industry designed to extract industrial chemicals in huge quantities from natural gas has sprouted on the prairie near this midwestern town.

The harvest wil be figured in millions of gallons and pounds of industrial alcohol, ethyl chloride, sulphuric acid, ammonia, propane and butane. Facilities of the elaborate fractionation plant include a 40-tank car loading setup for rail shipments of the products.

John E. Bierwirth, president of National Distillers Corp., operators of the plant through its National Petro-chemical Corp., says it is the company's greatest step to diversify its manufacturing operations.

The 50 million dollar plant draws the chemicals from 400 million cubic feet of natural gas pumped each day from the Panhandle Eastern Pipe Lines' nearby compressor station. This is the junction of two natural gas pipe lines. One is from the Hugoton field in southwestern Kansas. The other is from the Texas - Louisiana Gulf area.

The giant 500-acre installation is owned 60 per cent by National Distillers Corp., and 40 per cent by Panhandle Eastern Pipe Line Co. The processed gas is piped on as fuel to consumers in Ohio and Michigan.

The industrial alcohol obtained from the natural gas is used as raw material or processing and for hundreds of products. They include synthetic rubber, nitrocellulose, explosives, drugs, photographic film and DDT.

Ethyl chloride derived from the gas is required for tetraethyl lead used in high-octane motor and aviation gasoline.

Largest Plant

The ethylene plant, the largest unit of its kind, can produce 200 million pounds a year. Some 125,000 gallons a day of 192 proof alcohol can be turned out by the synthetic alcohol unit, one of the largest in the United States.

Among the hydrocarbons produced, propane, butane and natural gasoline are salable without further processing.

Tuscola is one of the very few places in the United States where both sulphuric acid and nitrogen solutions are produced. A two million dollar sulphuric acid plant provides acid for the petrol alcohol manufacturing process.

A seven million dollar unit built to produce 50,000 tons of ammonia a year provides nitrogen used in fertilizer manufacture.

Another unit still to be built will convert ethylene into polyethylene, a rubber-like plastic used as food packaging material and as insulation for electric wire.

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