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Labor Board Upholds Unions On Demands for Safety Data

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WASHINGTON, April 14 -- The National Labor Relations Board ruled Tuesday that three companies committed unfair labor practices by denying requests for worker health, safety and medical information.

In the decision, the board held that the companies improperly withheld the generic, that is, scientific, names of substances used and produced at their plants when those data were requested by unions representing the workers.

The board held that such information was relevant to a union's function as a representative of workers. The agency found that a union was entitled to full disclosure of the requested health and safety information "to the extent that such disclosure is consonant with the protection of individual employees' privacy rights and the companies' legitimate proprietary confidentiality concerns," the board said in a statement describing the opinions.

The two unions involved in the case are the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers and the Chemical Workers. The cases involved Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing, Colgate-Palmolive and Borden Chemical, a division of Borden Inc. Offices of all three companies were closed when the ruling was came down and company officials could not immediately be reached for comment.

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