



Cap Carpenter — Mercury News

Children at San Anselmo School play next to worker drilling well to monitor toxic chemicals

Lives of neighbors contaminated by fear

A year ago, when Linda Romano heard that mothers in the Los Paseos development were worried about chemicals in their drinking water, she figured that was their problem, not hers.

After all, the Los Paseos neighborhood was east of Santa Teresa Boulevard and nearly a mile from her own home.

But today, Romano and many of her neighbors feel differently.

They don't drink their tap water, because they're afraid that it's tainted with industrial chemicals. They drink bottled water or use water-purification filters. Romano even had her water tested at an independent laboratory, and her neighbors are thinking of doing the same.

Although Romano's water showed no detectable

amounts of industrial chemicals, her concern remains so high that she still will not drink it — and she won't let her 2-year-old son, Peter, drink it, either.

Romano's anxieties began in December, when the cleanup of a chemical leak from Fairchild Camera and Instrument Corp. brought large drilling rigs into the calm of her suburban neighborhood. Until then, Romano had thought the spill, detected a year earlier, had affected only neighborhoods closer to the plant.

But officials last fall had noted an increase of contamination in some monitoring wells, and a new series of cleanup wells was drilled. One was just a few yards from Romano's home. Another was drilled at nearby San Anselmo elementary school.

Despite assurances from Fairchild officials that the wells are a good sign — indicators that the under-

ground pollution is being cleaned up — many residents have not been reassured.

The constant, droning hum of pumps still keeps Romano awake at night — and away from her faucets.

"There isn't anybody telling us what's going on," Romano said. "The least they can do is come by and tell us what they're doing."

A neighbor, Debra Parr, said that when the drilling rigs first appeared in the neighborhood, she and Romano "spent the day making calls, but all we got was the major runaround."

Parr said she has resorted to hauling water from her in-laws' house south of San Jose.

"I even put bottled water in my baby's vaporizer," she said.

— Susan Yoachim