

Group wants IBM to purify water in contaminated wells

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treatment filters at other wells in the future if and when contaminants are discovered. The filters would catch contaminants but allow well water to continue through to distribution systems.

Dick O'Connell, an IBM spokesman, said Friday, "We think we've been doing the right things and going in the right direction and we're having some pretty good success."

Ted Smith, the coalition's chairman, said that three local politicians acted as intermediaries for the coalition, trying but failing to set up meetings between Smith's group and IBM. They were San Jose Mayor Tom McEnery, Santa Clara County Supervisor Susanne Wilson and state Assemblyman John Vasconcellos, D-San Jose.

The three haven't endorsed the coalition's plan, Smith said, but "all three thought our proposal was reasonable."

When O'Connell was asked why IBM officials would not meet with the coalition to discuss its proposal, he replied, "We have to deal with the Regional Water Quality Control Board. We can't, at the 11th hour, get involved in some process with someone else."

On Tuesday night, the coalition will formally present its proposal to the San Francisco Bay Region Water Quality Control Board at a hearing scheduled to discuss IBM's own plan for continuing to contain and clean up its toxic leak.

"We think that IBM has let the genie out of the bottle, and we ask that they put it back," Smith said, adding later, "We don't pick a fight with IBM lightly."

IBM is proposing that they do nothing about the contamination in the wells because the concentrations are significantly lower than state "action levels," which would require state officials to look for a remedy.

For example, the state action level for TCA is 200 parts per billion, but most of the wells the toxics coalition is concerned about have TCA concentrations

“We think we've been doing the right things.”

— Dick O'Connell, IBM spokesman

of less than five parts per billion.

The coalition representatives, however, said that not enough is known about TCA, and there are some indications that it may cause cancer. If that's the case, then the coalition thinks that the action level should be reduced drastically.

But until water board officials find out whether TCA might cause cancer, the coalition thinks the board should proceed as if TCA does cause cancer or it should delay making a decision on IBM's proposal.

State and federal water and environmental officials think the evidence just isn't sufficient to treat TCA as a carcinogen.

The wells that concern the coalition are located in a portion of the underground plume, or spread of contamination, that is north of the intersection of Capitol Expressway and Monterey Road.

The plume is shaped like a figure eight, and the wells are located in the northern loop of the eight. The IBM plant at 5600 Cottle Road is located in the bottom tip of the southern loop.

The center of the "eight" is the intersection of the two streets, and the contaminants are slowly moving south to north. The top and bottom halves are divided by a geologic formation at the intersection called Edenvale Gap.

IBM already has spent an estimated \$20 million to excavate contaminated soil and pump out contaminated water south of Edenvale Gap. And the company has installed extraction wells near the gap to block more chemicals from moving north of it.

"They've been working diligently to clean up" the ground water contamination south of Edenvale Gap, Smith said.

Coalition wants IBM to treat water

By Mitchel Benson
Mercury News Environment Writer

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After failing to persuade IBM to talk privately on the subject, the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition went public Friday with its proposal that the computer company purify water supplies contaminated by chemicals linked to its plant in South San Jose.

At a news conference held in San Jose City Hall, coalition officials called on the company to install filtering devices at seven public water wells contaminated with low levels of the solvent trichloroethane and Freon 113. The coalition estimated that that would cost IBM \$1 million to \$5 million.

"We don't think that's too much to ask of a company that has put these deadly chemicals in our ground water," said Peter Cervantes-Gautschl, secretary of the coalition of environmental and labor groups.

The coalition also wants IBM to install the carbon-

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