

# Water board approves IBM's toxic cleanup plan

**Examiner South Bay Bureau**  
SAN JOSE — The state Regional Water Quality Control Board last night approved IBM's cleanup plan for a toxic chemical leak — despite strong opposition from residents, environmentalists and some city officials.

Opponents said the plan will continue to allow low levels of contamination to remain in underground water supplies in south San Jose.

Community activists and city officials had urged the water board to order further monitoring to define the exact extent of the contamination by the solvents TCA — trichlorethane — and freon from IBM's 4-year-old underground toxic chemical leak at its plant on Cottle Road.

They also wanted the state to force IBM to use carbon filters to treat polluted ground water before it is served to the public.

Board member Ken Mercer, who cast the only opposing vote, said he "felt the tentative order could have been more stringent" and should have required the extra monitoring and the carbon treatment of contaminated drinking water.

About 300 people turned out for the meeting and after the board's vote, some yelled out at the board members that they had "sold out" south San Jose residents who may now have to drink contaminated water.

IBM reported the chemical leak to state authorities in October 1980, and since then, the company has spent about \$20 million attempting to re-

move the pollution. The cost included digging more than 300 monitoring wells to discover the extent of the contamination and pumping more than a billion gallons of contaminated underground water.

Peter Johnson, a water board engineer, said the IBM monitoring has shown that the leak has contaminated two regions of the underground water supply.

One region is south of an underground geological feature called the Edenvale Gap. The other region is north of the gap. According to Johnson, a thin, fast-moving ribbon of contamination has escaped through the gap and is threatening water supplies to the north. It is this northern portion of pollution which is headed toward central San Jose that has worried local residents.

Johnson estimated that any further monitoring and cleanup program north of the gap may cost IBM \$9 million in capital expenditures as well as \$2 million a year in operations and analytical costs.

Any further extensive program would not be cost-effective, he said.

As a result, the water board's approved plan will not require IBM to determine the extent of the northern pollution or to conduct any cleanup program north of the gap.

IBM will have to test water wells in the area to ensure they are not contaminated by dangerous levels of toxics. The company's environmental programs manager H. Ray Kerby told the board that "the reasonable, intelli-

gent application of money is really the issue."

Ted Smith, chairman of the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, said the water board members "caved in to IBM obviously, and showed their complete contempt for the people of San Jose."

Mike Belliveau, a spokesman for Citizens for a Better Environment, said, "It was a sellout. The board could have taken a position of protecting the public health, but they hid behind a bureaucratic veil."

Water board members told the crowd to turn to local officials if they want their water to be treated with carbon filters. The board cannot legally require a specific treatment program.

The Toxics Coalition said it plans to appeal the board's decision to the state Water Resources Control Board in Sacramento. If necessary, the coalition will file a lawsuit to force a complete toxic cleanup, Smith said.

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