

WATER

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tamination is well within state health standards.

The board's 6-1 vote marks the first time the regulatory agency has permitted a firm to leave residual amounts of toxic chemicals in ground water.

The decision angered environmentalists, local government officials and San Jose residents, who said the board had set a dangerous precedent for permitting companies to leave detectable levels of hazardous chemicals in previously pure ground water.

The site under discussion at Tuesday's meeting involved pollution discovered by IBM in 1980.

The computer company will continue to clean up the solvents in a reservoir of underground water within about three miles of the plant, near Curtner Road and the old Monterey Highway in San Jose.

But IBM may abandon efforts to clean up the ground water that has low levels of the solvent trichloroethane (TCA) and Freon 113 in a second area three-to-five miles

north of the plant — as long as more solvents do not seep into the area, the water board decided.

The Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition and other environmental watchdog groups said they would appeal the regional water board's decision to the state Water Resources Control Board.

Regional water control engineers denied charges that the decision to allow small amounts of the solvents in the water would set a dangerous precedent of "how clean is clean" — of what level of contamination would be acceptable in the ground water. Instead, the water board will continue to approve companies' cleanup plans on an individual basis, said Don Eisenburg, a section leader in the toxics division of the water board.

In the meantime, the board is considering seeking monetary penalties against IBM for the leak.

The board's decision Tuesday night followed several hours of testimony from San Jose residents, environmentalists, water district officials and local politicians, almost all of whom urged the board to be stricter with IBM.

The Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors, the San Jose City Council and the Santa Clara Valley

Water District opposed the board's action. Most members of the audience were pleased with IBM's proposals to clean up contamination in the heart of the leak.

Supervisor Susanne Wilson said that the plume of contamination eventually could reach wells that supply drinking water to San Jose residents.

No level of the toxic chemicals should be permitted in drinking water supplies as long as little is known about their effect on humans, said Pat Lamborn, of the Santa Clara Center for Occupational Safety and Health. Health studies on TCA have been inconclusive and now are being reviewed, including one that found female mice developed lymph and liver cancer after ingesting TCA.

"Santa Clara County residents should not be required to become the unwilling subjects of a long term health study," Wilson said. "We do not believe in civil liberties for toxic chemicals ..."

State Department of Health Services officials at the meeting, however, said the levels of TCA and Freon that would be left in the ground water were "safe."

"That is clean water; it is safe for drinking; it protects the public

health," said Richard McMillan, regional engineer in the sanitary engineering branch of the health services department.

The TCA and Freon were found in levels up to 6 parts per billion in the ground water. By comparison, state recommended health standards allow 200 parts per billion of TCA and federal standards are even more lenient.

Some members of the audience, however, urged the water board to be cautious because the solvent could one day be proven to be a carcinogen. The steps they urged included:

- Requiring IBM to install carbon filters on about 20 public and private wells in the area to make sure no one would drink water contaminated by the solvents. The board said it did not have the authority to require IBM to put filters on drinking water wells.

- Requiring IBM to drill more monitoring wells in the outlying area to define the full extent of the contamination there. The water board said current wells in the area were adequate to keep track of the flow of groundwater contamination in the area.

"We've got hundreds of these sites out there," Eisenburg said.

IBM permitted to leave residual toxics in water

By Ann Gibbons
Times Tribune staff

SAN JOSE — IBM will not have to completely purify all of the ground water tainted with toxic solvents near its south San Jose computer plant, according to a controversial decision Tuesday by regional water officials.

The Regional Water Quality Control Board decided that after \$20 million in cleanup efforts, IBM should concentrate on removing the heart of the remaining contamination and may abandon efforts on the fringe, where residual con-

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