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80 frightened by toxic leaks, plan battle

By Ruthann Richter
Times Tribune staff

About 80 residents from Mountain View and Sunnyvale, frightened that the water they've been drinking and washing with may make them or their children sick, met Tuesday night to figure out what they should do about the prob-

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lem.

In an emotional two-hour gathering at a Sunnyvale church, the residents listened intently to a physician as he described the possible health effects from the contamination and to local electronics workers who had experienced serious health problems due to exposure to toxic chemicals on the job.

"I came here to say that our health is worth more than anyone's profit margin, and our children are worth more than anybody's (electronics) chips," said Anita Zimmerman, a former Advanced Micro De-



Times Tribune staff photo by Victor Volto

Ted Smith, chairman of the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, points to a map showing contaminated wells during a meeting Tuesday night at Sunnyvale.

vices employee who claims lung damage as a result of exposure to toxic chemicals.

"Please help to fight to keep our communities clean and our children healthy. No one knows what's going to happen to us — the victims — 10 years from now," she said to resounding applause.

The problem is most severe in the North Bayshore area of Moun-

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tor of the Santa Clara County Department of Public Health, said she expected to receive results this week from tests of the rest of the approximately 35 wells in the area. She said she expects the tests to show more wells are contaminated because they are scattered in locations between the eight wells already proved to contain TCE.

"If these tests came back negative (without TCE), I would be so surprised that I'd send them back for more tests," Gianniracusa said today.

TCE was widely used in the electronics industry to clean silicon chips until several years ago, when it was found to cause liver cancer in laboratory mice.

About 120 residents draw water from the wells, some using it for all purposes, while others drink bottled water and use well water for bathing or washing clothes.

In Sunnyvale, TCE was found last week in ground water that is heading north through a local neighborhood, approaching Duane Avenue. Nearby companies, Signetics Corp., TRW Systems Group and AMD, have been ordered by the state to clean up the leaks that are believed to have come from storage tanks on or near Arques Avenue.

The three known private wells in the area have been tested for contamination and have been found to be clean. Municipal water supplies also have been given a clean bill of health. Still, the residents are worried and want to be sure the threat to their water remains nothing more than a threat.

leaks which have contaminated their water.

Dr. Jim Cone, chief of the Occupational Health Clinic at San Francisco General Hospital, told the residents Tuesday that workers in the dry cleaning industry, where the solvent also was once commonly used, have been shown in some studies to have a high incidence of lung, liver and cervical cancer and leukemia.

He said TCE, ingested at high levels, also can attack the central nervous system, causing drowsiness, slow memory, headaches, irritability and subtle mood changes. In addition, studies suggest it may cause chromosomal changes that can affect an unborn child, he said.

"We're asked to be patient until the long-term health effects (of TCE) are seen," Cone said. "That's the most frightening aspect of this."

After Cone's presentation, one Mountain View resident whose well water was found to contain 1,100 parts per billion of TCE said she began wondering about symptoms of illness she has had in the past year.

"I would get very dizzy and disoriented, and I couldn't think straight," said Bonnie Jones, who has lived for 4½ years at 1523 Plymouth St. "Now I'm starting to wonder, with those things the doctor mentioned."

Jones and all of her neighbors in the three-block area have been warned by the Santa Clara County Health Department not to drink or cook with their well water. For some of the residents, there is a basic problem of how to cope without readily available clean water for daily use.

"Do you have a solution to the immediate problem of living?" one frustrated Mountain View woman

getting the state or some industry association to pay for connecting residences to the city water system. Both prospects are now being pursued by the county health department.

About 20 Mountain View residents also have approached John Tyndall, a partner in the Boccardo Law Firm in San Jose, regarding a possible lawsuit to recover damages from the contamination. Tyndall, who attended the Tuesday meeting but did not speak, said he would file a lawsuit "imminently" against Teledyne Semiconductor on behalf of the Mountain View residents who contacted him. State officials believe a leaking underground tank at Teledyne and at other nearby firms may be responsible for the TCE contamination.

Tyndall said the lawsuit will ask that the health of residents be monitored and will request damages to compensate for the "fear of getting cancer or chromosomal damage."

Tyndall represents more than 400 South San Jose residents in two lawsuits filed against Fairchild Camera and Instrument Corp. over a leak discovered in drinking water in San Jose in 1981.

He said today that the Mountain View residents who are his clients report "fatigue, nervousness, lassitude, neuro-muscular aches and tingling in their fingertips."

Tyndall said his firm also has hired a consultant to test tap water in Sunnyvale for clients who live near the leak of TCE there.

Tuesday's meeting concluded with a decision to meet again July 3 to continue discussing possible actions. The meeting will begin at 7:30 p.m. at St. Mark's Lutheran Church at the corner of Arques and Sunnyvale avenues.

The meetings are being sponsored by the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, a citizens' activist group

Dr. Bernice Gianniracusa, director.
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