

Have a safe Fourth of July



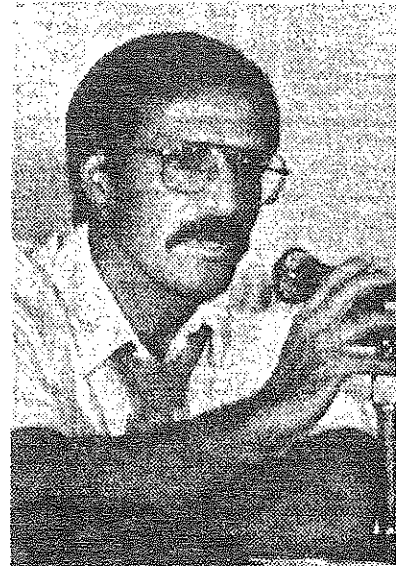
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Harry Seraydarian
... sites must be on U.S. list.

200 demand toxic cleanup

By Ann Gibbons
Times Tribune staff

More than 200 people jammed a hot church auditorium in Sunnyvale Tuesday night to demand that more be done to clean up toxic chemicals threatening Santa Clara Valley's water supplies.

Most of the people urged the government to immediately start the cleanup of toxic chemicals that have leaked into the soil and ground water at 120 sites in the Bay Area. They called upon the federal Environmental Protection Agency specifically to join state and local efforts to clean up the contaminated sites.

"The state and local government

agencies, as hard as they try, don't have the resources to effectively contain what's left to clean up the 100 or so spills in the county," said Ted Smith, chairman of the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, a citizens' watchdog group that organized Tuesday night's meeting.

It was the second time residents of the valley had met at St. Mark's Lutheran Church since high levels of the toxic solvent trichloroethylene (TCE) had been found in 30 of 36 private drinking water wells tested in Mountain View three weeks ago. No contamination has been found in public drinking water supplies.

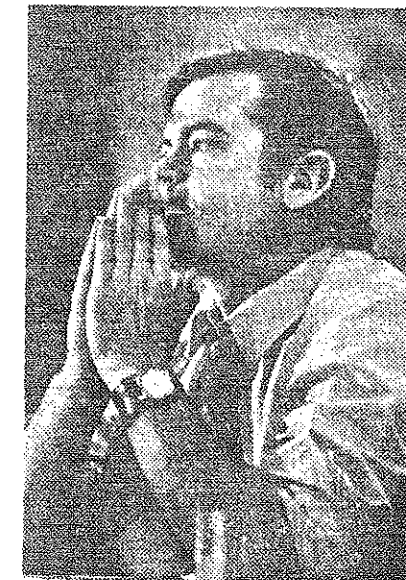
Some of the residents at the meeting were angry and demanded

that government agencies do more to protect their drinking water and their health.

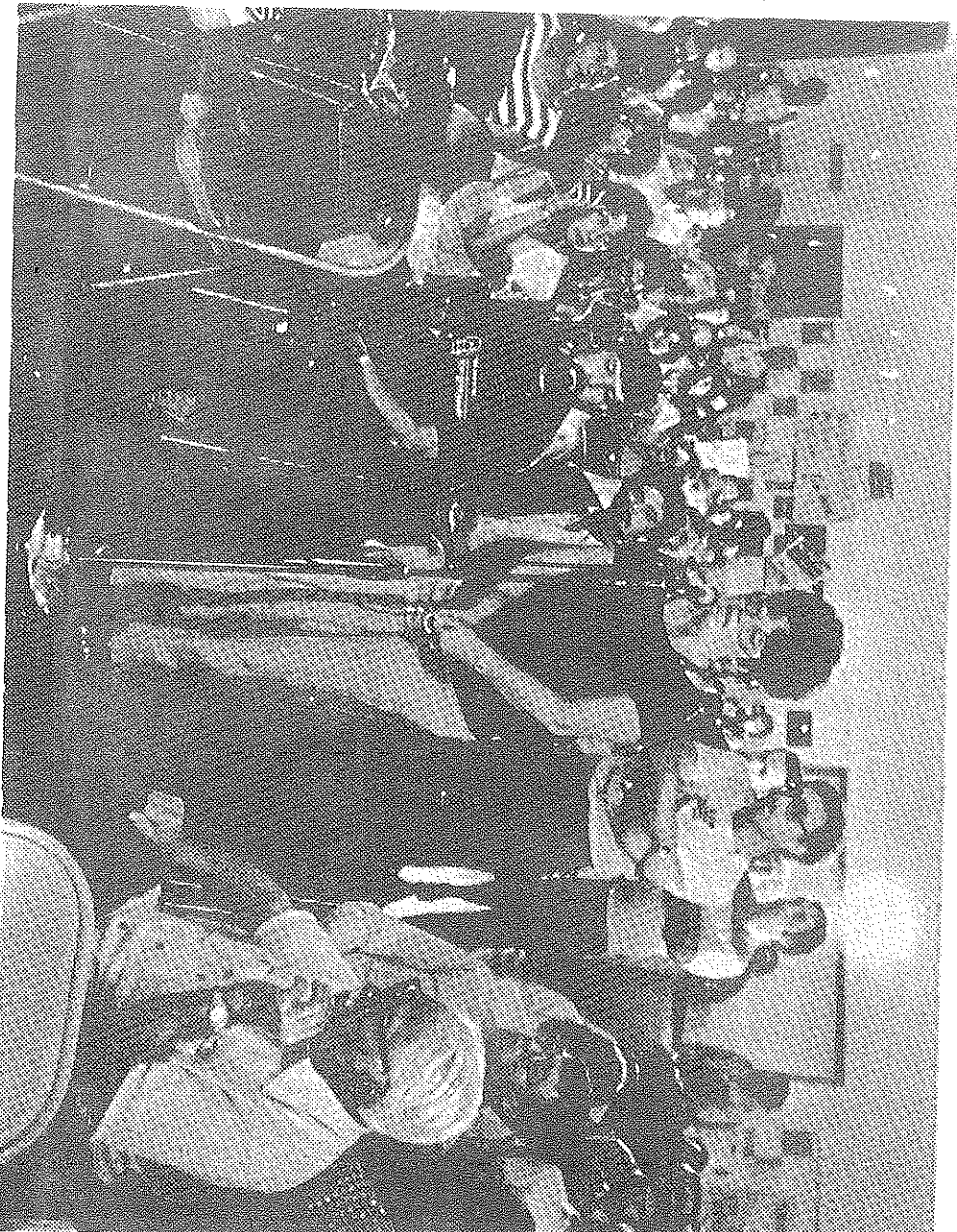
They called on two congressmen at the meeting — Ed Zschau, R-Los Altos, and Norman Mineta, D-San Jose — to make commitments now to get federal dollars to clean up the toxic waste sites. The residents also criticized government agencies and industry for doing too little too late to protect underground drinking-water supplies.

"If companies are going to use chemicals, they need to make darn sure we don't end up drinking them," said Bonnie Jones. Her family was warned three weeks ago to

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Ted Smith
... chairman of watchdog group.



Times Tribune staff photo by Sam Forencich

Sunnyvale resident Elaine Davidson, a former employee of Signetics Corp., told more than 200 people at a meeting in Sunnyvale Tuesday night that electronics companies have been sloppy with toxic chemicals and now should be held responsible for the cleanup of toxic leaks. She said she was told to dump solvents down the drain into sewer lines when she worked at Signetics in the 1970s.

TOXIC

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 stop drinking water from its private well on Plymouth Street in Mountain View because it was contaminated with high levels of TCE.

At a press conference earlier Tuesday, industry representatives from the American Electronics Association (AEA) said that about 20 companies already have spent an estimated \$70 million in the past two years on cleanup, detection and protection against leaks.

Ralph Thomson, senior vice president of the AEA, said "key water supplies are safe" and that companies responsible for the leaks have responded voluntarily to the problem.

Residents whose water supplies were polluted in Mountain View, however, said Tuesday night that industry's voluntary action to date did not prevent the contamination of their water. They urged government agencies to be more aggressive with the companies responsible for the leaks.

"If a restaurant is dirty, the health department can walk in and order it cleaned up right away. Why can't it tell these companies to clean up the leaks and give them a time limit? If the companies don't meet the limit, they should be closed down — like restaurants," said Ron Anderson, a Mountain View resident whose well also was contaminated.

Many of the people at the meeting approved by a voice vote a list of demands drafted by the toxics coalition. The list called upon the EPA to clean up 120 toxic spill sites the coalition has identified in the Santa Clara Valley, to sue the companies involved in the leaks, to relocate residents where needed, to provide medical screening and health care to residents and to perform thorough air and water pollution tests.

Harry Seraydarian, director of toxics and waste management for the EPA in San Francisco, and the two congressmen said the federal government could not meet all of

those demands. However, they did report the following:

● Industry, not the federal government, should pay the cost of cleaning up the toxic sites. The federal government should pay only when industry does not or cannot pay the price.

"I don't think there is any question but that industry is responsible for paying those (cleanup) costs," Zschau said. "The cost should be assessed to industry rather than taxpayers at large."

Seraydarian said the EPA cannot spend money to clean up toxic wastes from ground water unless the site of the contamination is included on a federal Superfund site list, which includes 547 sites in the United States. None of the toxic leak sites in the Santa Clara Valley is now included on that list, and only a handful are eligible for money from a similar state Superfund list.

● Mineta wrote a letter Monday to the federal Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, requesting the center to send a team of physicians and toxicologists to the Santa Clara Valley to study the health effects of the solvents and other toxic chemicals in the drinking water supplies.

● Mineta said he would urge President Reagan to issue an executive order to release emergency money to clean up toxic contamination in the valley. Zschau said he would not seek an executive order until he was certain industry would not pay for the clean-up costs.

● Zschau said he had met with industry officials at a meeting at the Hewlett-Packard Co. in Palo Alto Tuesday to remind them that they are responsible for the contamination and, therefore, should move quickly to clean it up. He said he personally would try to persuade industries to pay the clean-up bills and to take action to prevent further contamination, rather than force them to do so with new legislation.

● Mineta said he would support legislation that would tax high technology companies using hazardous chemicals. The tax money would be used to pay to clean up toxic

sites and to relocate nearby families.

Zschau said he would not support the so-called "high-tech user tax."

● The EPA only has paid to relocate people where they have physically contacted hazardous chemicals directly, such as people living in a trailer park in Arizona built on top of an abandoned asbestos mine. The EPA will not relocate people whose drinking water has been contaminated, but it sometimes will pay for alternative drinking water supplies, Seraydarian said. Congress has made no provisions for the federal government to pay for health care or medical tests for people exposed to toxic chemicals at the federal Superfund sites.

● The EPA has referred four cases this year to the U.S. Justice Department for prosecution where industries failed to clean up contamination. The legal action is used only as a last resort where industries have been blatantly uncooperative, Seraydarian said.

As Seraydarian described the restrictions that prevent the EPA from becoming involved in the cleanup of Santa Clara Valley sites, many of the people in the audience hissed.

They vowed to seek legislative action to require the EPA to become involved more directly in the toxic sites in the Bay Area.

"We need action, we need reaction and we need dramatic action right now," toxic coalition chairman Smith said.

Roger James, executive officer of the Regional Water Quality Control Board, said in an interview after the meeting that he asked the EPA Tuesday to sponsor a toxicological study on the health effects of the chemicals that have contaminated ground water. The study would be in laymen's terms so that the public can understand the risk.

He also asked the EPA to provide manpower and consultants to review cleanup plans for toxic waste sites. The EPA also should launch an investigation of abandoned agricultural wells in the valley, which could carry hazardous chemicals between different levels of ground water.