

Thursday morning, August 16, 1984

Morning
Final

San Jose Mercury News

Serving Northern California Since 1851

25 cents

Silicon Valley may join toxic cleanup list

EPA won't name worst leaks until October

Cupertino, Santa Clara, Sunnyvale, Milpitas, San Jose, Palo Alto, East Palo Alto and Livermore.

Many of the toxic contamination problems detected in the South Bay recently have been chemical leaks from electronic companies, some of which threaten drinking water supplies with cancer-causing substances.

Tonight's meeting is sponsored by the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, a blend of labor and environmentalist groups that

Back of Section, Col. 1

Seraydarian said he will formally announce the regional office's decision tonight at a community meeting at San Jose High School, 275 N. 24th St. But he said the locations of the 13 to 20 sites won't be revealed until October.

The contaminated area being studied by the EPA encompasses Mountain View, Cupertino, Santa Clara, Sunnyvale, Milpitas, San Jose, Palo Alto, East Palo Alto and Livermore.

ture and import of certain petrochemical products. "What we want to deal with is the regional problem. We'd like to look at the whole area because there might be additional sites that haven't been identified," said Harry Seraydarian, director of the toxics and waste management division in the EPA's regional office in San Francisco.

basin or area rather than as individual problems. The superfund law, enacted in 1980, allows the government to clean up hazardous waste sites and respond to many hazardous waste sites. If a site is added to the superfund list, the EPA can use its authority and money to clean it up. Most of the funds come from taxes on the manufacture of hazardous waste.

Federal environmental officials in San Francisco have proposed for the first time that a number of chemically contaminated areas in Silicon Valley be added to the government's "superfund" list of the nation's worst hazardous waste sites.

In addition, the San Francisco regional office of the Environmental Protection Agency has proposed to its headquarters in Washington that EPA treat the estimated 13 to 20 chemical leaks — whose locations have not been made public — as one large

3A2-10A-70

Silicon Valley may join list of worst waste sites

Continued from Page 1A

has demanded that EPA clean up an estimated 120 contaminated sites in Silicon Valley and sue industry to recover the cleanup costs.

Seraydarian said his presentation will not focus on the question of whether the contamination sites warrant superfund designation, but on what EPA knows and doesn't know about the contamination problem in the Valley, what has and has not been done to clean it up and what it hopes will be done.

But even if a site is on the superfund list, the EPA still encourages industry to pay for its own messes. There are now 546 sites on the superfund list, 19 of them in California.

None are now connected to the high-technology groundwater contamination problem in the South Bay.

"It may directly or indirectly apply additional pressure to industry," Seraydarian said of a superfund listing. "But I think the positive way to view it is that it will allow EPA to justify its involvement and facilitate dealing with the problem on a regional basis."

"Most people assume it (superfund money) will be used," Seraydarian added. "But the majority of sites have responsible parties taking action. And that's what we have now. And that's what we'll have after it's listed."

Too complicated

Ted Smith, chairman of the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, and three Bay Area congressmen have argued that a superfund designation is necessary for the entire basin area because the cleanup would be too complicated, time-consuming and expensive for private industry and local and state government to coordinate and pay for themselves.

Smith said Wednesday of the EPA's proposal, "We're pleased that they're finally taking action, and we realize that they never would have if we hadn't kicked up a fuss. But it's certainly not enough (sites). We're going to have to keep on plugging and keep on pushing to continue moving and actually free up the money that we need, which is actually the bottom line."

At the same time, at least one industry representative says his group has had a change of heart about the EPA's getting involved in the groundwater contamination problem.

'Initial perception'

"Our initial perception was the the problem could be handled locally, without being aware of what ways superfund could help or hinder," said Peter Giles, president of the Santa Clara County Manufacturing Group.

Giles reiterated those sentiments in a July 24 letter to Santa Clara County Executive Sally Reed.

"Our initial emphasis is on areas of self-policing and to assist in aiding in a speedy determination of the extent of the chemical leakage problem," Giles wrote to Reed, who is co-chairman of the South Bay Ground Water Contamination Task Force, a group of govern-

But Giles said Wednesday that after several meetings with EPA representatives, members of his group believe superfund will be helpful "to retain and to augment a state-led, regional effort to clean up this situation in the most expeditious manner. We're certainly not opposed to that as a way of getting on to that quickly."

\$70 million spent

At the same time, other industry voices have insisted that they have accomplished more in cleaning up contamination sites than they've been given credit for.

For example, the American Electronics Association, another trade group, has estimated that about 20 companies already have spent an estimated \$70 million in the past two years on cleanup, detection and protection against leaks.

Seraydarian said Wednesday that the EPA will not reveal the identity of the 13 to 20 sites until October. That's when the EPA is expected to list in the Federal Register those hazardous waste sites that EPA regional offices across the country are proposing for what is called the superfund National Priorities List.

Such delays on disclosure anger some residents of the South Bay, including Peter Cervantes-Gautschi, business manager of the Santa Clara County Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO.

Cervantes-Gautschi said it is particularly important for laborers who work underground and near water supplies — and their families — to know where the worst contamination is and what safety precautions they must take if they work near them.

Must list it first

"Until they tell us that," he said, "whether they do any listing — this whole superfund thing — is really just eye wash."

Seraydarian said EPA officials consider the drafting of the list of proposed sites a regulatory action, and consider any steps taken before the publication of the list or regulation a confidential matter.

Once the list is published, the public has 60 days to comment. Then the agency prepares a final list, which is not expected out until early next year.

But Seraydarian said EPA can start to take some action as soon as the sites are proposed. And he said he is confident that EPA headquarters will approve at least 13 of the sites and the basin concept in its final rule.

He said "it can only help" that Reps. Norman Mineta, D-San Jose, Ed Zschau, R-Los Altos, and Don Edwards, D-San Jose, have written a letter to EPA Administrator William Ruckelshaus asking that the entire Santa Clara Valley be placed on the superfund list.

As for Smith's concern that the number of sites being proposed is too small, Seraydarian said the EPA regional office could propose others in later years.

He said EPA reviewed the files and reports of the Regional Water Quality Control Board to identify 13 sites that EPA officials "are

7-16-87
7-16-87