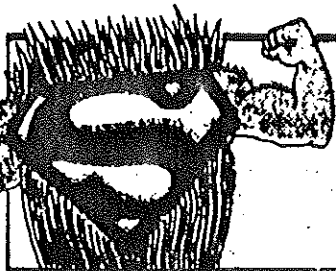


# Super Bowl Countdown



GARDEN

## Stanford's turf has never been greener

■ Mark Purdy's Super Survey	1C
■ Florida governor's business bowl	14A
■ How to handle 'Dollfane'	1F
■ Haven for the un-Faithful	1B

Thursday morning, January 17, 1985

# San Jose Mercury News

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## High birth defects rate in spill area

### Los Paseos residents 'convinced' toxic leak caused birth defects

By Mitchel Benson  
and Pamela Kramer  
Mercury News Staff Writers

Four-year-old Brian Puppo wants to be a pilot.

"But I don't think he can ... It would be too much of a health risk," said his mother, Susan, as she recalled the long list of health problems that have affected her son since birth and forced him to undergo open-heart surgery four times in his short life.

Susan Puppo and her husband, Rick, told Brian's story over and over again

Wednesday after county and state health officials released a study of the Puppos' neighborhood that showed an excess of miscarriages, congenital heart abnormalities and total birth defects in 1980 and 1981.

The officials couldn't say definitely that a chemical leak that contaminated the South San Jose neighborhood's water supply was responsible for the birth defects and miscarriages.

But the Puppos don't care.

The couple is convinced it was that

*Continued on Page 7A*

### Highlights of studies

- About twice as many miscarriages in the Los Paseos neighborhood in 1980-81 as in a nearby control neighborhood that has had no known water contamination.
- About three times as many birth defects in Los Paseos in 1980-81 as in the control neighborhood.
- More than twice as many major heart defects among infants born as a result of pregnancies in 1981 in the area served by the Great Oaks Water Co. as in the rest of Santa Clara County.
- The studies do not indicate the causes.

*For the state health department's full summaries of the findings, see Page 6A.*

### Site near S.J.'s Fairchild plant shows cluster effect, state says

By Susan Yoachim  
and Mitchel Benson  
Staff Writers

A study released by the state Wednesday confirmed that an unusually high number of birth defects and miscarriages occurred in a South San Jose neighborhood near a contaminated drinking-water well.

The study, conducted by the state Department of Health Services and the Santa Clara County Health Department, focused on pregnancies in the Los Paseos neighborhood, near the Fair-

child Camera and Instrument Corp. plant, in 1980 and 1981.

A related study by the same agencies that also was released Wednesday showed that the rate of a specific form of birth defect, congenital heart malformation, was higher in the South San Jose area served by the Great Oaks Water Co. than in the rest of Santa Clara County.

The unusually high cluster of miscarriages and birth defects is only the second that state officials have ever con-

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## Mercury News Special Report

# High rate of birth defects in S.J. area confirmed

Continued from Page 1A  
 firmed in California. The first involved a group of neural-tube defects in Antioch.

"We never expected (the data) to turn out positive," said one health department official. "We were extremely surprised."

Health officials said at a news conference in San Jose that they do not know what caused the high rate of miscarriages and birth defects in Los Paseos and the cluster of congenital heart defects in the larger area served by Great Oaks.

But Dr. Kenneth Kizer, the state health department's deputy director, said "At this time, contaminated drinking water cannot be ruled out as a contributing cause."

The high rate of birth defects and miscarriages in Los Paseos was first suspected three years ago, after residents there learned that one of their drinking-water wells had been contaminated with chemicals from a leaking underground storage tank at the Fairchild Camera and Instrument Corp. at 101 Bernal Road. The chemicals were industrial cleaning solvents called trichloroethane and dichloroethylene.

The Los Paseos study released Wednesday showed that, for pregnancies in 1980 and 1981, the miscarriage rate in that neighborhood was 21.5 percent — or about twice as great as the 11 percent miscarriage rate in a nearby control neighborhood. The control area — bounded by Branham Lane, Snell Avenue, Blossom Hill Road and Almaden Expressway — had no known water contamination and was demographically similar to Los Paseos.

The usual miscarriage rate in the general population is also about 11 percent, health officials said.

The study also showed that, during the same period, the overall birth defect rate in Los Paseos was more than three times as great as the 2.8 percent birth defect rate in the control area.

Health officials said the usual birth defect rate in the general population is about 4 percent.

The Los Paseos study was based on interviews with residents of Los Paseos and the control areas.

The second study, which was based on reviews of hospital records, showed that the incidence of congenital heart malformations was more than twice as high in the Great Oaks service area as in the rest of the county for pregnancies occurring during 1981.

Because of the geographical distribution of the 12 cardiac defects reported in the Great Oaks service area, the study said it is unlikely that they are linked to the Fairchild chemical leak. That is because many of the babies with heart defects were born to mothers living in the north end of the Great Oaks service area, while the Fairchild plant is at the south end.

However, health officials said Wednesday that the findings of the two studies may or may not be related, meaning that contaminated water cannot be ruled out as a contributing cause of the birth defects and miscarriages.

"We have a lot of evidence to think they're not related," said

## Where to find copies of report

State Department of Health Services officials said four copies of their report are expected to be available, beginning today, at each of two libraries in or near the Los Paseos neighborhood. They are the Pearl Avenue Library, 4270 Pearl Ave., and the Santa Teresa Library, 290 International Circle. One copy of the report eventually is expected to be available at other branch libraries throughout San Jose.

In addition, the state has set up a hot line to take questions about the report. That number is 299-4932.

## Jose residents'

Rep. Norm Mineta (D-San Jose) said his "fear is that these are the early reports of casualties that have resulted from the toxic waste crisis with more to follow."

Mineta said he will ask the Environmental Protection Agency to tell him this week "what measures the EPA will take to respond to the health problems that are evident in this report." Mineta said he will also ask the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta for an evaluation of the problem.

"The report shows us that there was a serious health problem present and there may still be one," Mineta added.

Fairchild spokeswoman Francine Plaza said that Fairchild does not dispute the findings.

"At this point, we don't refute the empirical statistical evidence," Plaza said. "We think that there are many questions which need to be explored."

Great Oaks Water Co. President Betty Roeder was critical Wednesday of health officials' failure to test the air in the areas under study for chemical contaminants. But she said she could not comment on the findings until she sees the report.

The inch-thick report states that investigators were able to rule out risk factors such as the mother's age or habits such as smoking or drinking as having contributed to the higher-than-usual incidence of miscarriages and birth defects in Los Paseos.

Kizer said officials were also able to rule out chance.

"These things could not occur by chance," he said. "There's a 99 percent certainty of that."

The only causes officials were unable to rule out, he said, are environmental factors such as water and air and the possibility of infectious disease such as a herpes virus.

The Fairchild chemical leak spawned several lawsuits after it was discovered in November 1981, including a multimillion-dollar suit filed by 266 neighborhood residents. Among those residents was Lorraine Ross, who was instrumental in getting the Los Paseos study started.

John Tyndall, attorney for the plaintiffs, said the study "confirms what Lorraine Ross and all the other mothers have said all along." Asked what the study's findings will mean to the case against Fairchild, Great Oaks and others, Tyndall smiled and said, "It certainly doesn't hurt it."

Mike Belliveau, an environmental chemist who is research director for Citizens for a Better Environment, said he was impressed with the studies but concerned about the fact that the findings don't answer the hows and whys of the increased rates of miscarriages, congenital heart abnormalities and birth defects overall.

"It just underscores the potential for disease to be caused by toxic exposure," he said. "We waited three years for this study, and it's raised more questions than it's answered. We can't wait for definitive answers to take action."

"We need to take even low levels of TCA out of the water now. We just can't wait for all the health questions to be answered."

John A. Harris, chief of the state's birth defects monitoring program.

Since January 1982, the state health department has spent about 10,000 hours and \$300,000 on the two highly detailed studies.

But the findings leave some questions unanswered.

For example, because the study of miscarriages and birth defects looked at pregnancies in 1980 and 1981 — and the study of cardiac defects looked at pregnancies in 1981 and 1982 — health officials cannot say whether the incidence of abnormal pregnancy outcomes continues to be higher than normal.

Kizer said the state has to conduct more studies to find out whether the rate of miscarriages and birth defects continued to exceed normal rates after 1981.

He said pregnant women who live in the Los Paseos neighborhood should not be alarmed, since "even during the study years, more than 91 percent of the births were totally normal."

"The odds are overwhelmingly in their favor," Kizer said, adding that he would recommend no special precautions for pregnant women who live in the area.

And even if the problems are related to contaminated drinking water, Kizer pointed out, the contaminated well has been shut off for three years and recent tests of other wells have shown no chemical contamination.

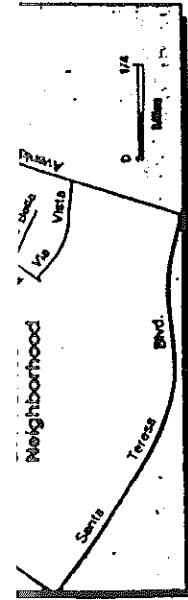
"I personally do not have any qualms about drinking the water," Kizer said.

"There's uncertainty in the report, but we can't create data that doesn't exist," Kizer said. "Our responsibility is to present the best scientific data, and everyone is going to come to their own conclusions."

Public officials wasted no time Wednesday in doing just that.

Santa Clara County Supervisor Susanne Wilson said, "We have to treat this as if water is the problem until we know otherwise... I have more questions today than yesterday, even though I have more facts today than yesterday."

San Jose Mayor Tom McEvoy said the results of the reports are "absolutely staggering in their implications to the health of San



Mercury News  
Numbers of birth defects and miscarriages in Los Pasosos were compared with those in a control area bounded by Bramhall Lane, Santa Avenue, Decorn Hill Road and the Alameda Expressway.

# Study called 'a bittersweet victory for us'

Continued from Page 1A  
leak of 1,1,1-trichlorethane from the Fairchild Camera and Instrument Corp. that has denied their son the opportunity to be a pilot.  
And even though the studies are inconclusive as to a cause, the Puppos — who are plaintiffs in a series of lawsuits against Fairchild and the area's water supplier, Great Oaks Water Co. — said they were pleased with the results.  
"That's what we suspected all along," said Rick Puppo, 33, a gardener.  
But the Puppos are now anxious for state health officials to follow up on the studies released Wednesday. In part, that's because Brian was born in 1980, and the congenital heart defects study dealt only with births in 1981 and 1982.  
Lorraine Ross, the woman credited with prompting the studies, said Wednesday's announcement signaled "a bittersweet victory for us."

"Nobody likes to be reminded of the fact that you live in a neighborhood where mothers lose their babies and babies are born with defects, but we feel justified now in having asked the health department to investigate," she said.  
Ross, whose daughter Julianna was born with a heart defect and underwent open surgery last April, is another plaintiff in the Fairchild lawsuit. She now lives in Gilroy, so her daughter wasn't counted in the numbers in the study.  
"I'm convinced it was the water," Ross added. "The people who are affected live with this every day."  
"This was step one, and it's been three years coming."  
While the Rosses have moved from their Los Pasosos neighborhood, the Puppos have not. "We can't afford to," said Susan Puppo. The family did immediately begin using bottled water after the leak was revealed, and installed a water treatment system within the past year.

They have also taken one further precaution: They won't be having any more children.  
"We wanted three kids," said Susan Puppo, who had another son with Rick who was born without any problems. "But after what we've been through with Brian, we

just wouldn't want to go through that again."  
The study surprised very few in the Puppos' neighborhood. And the group of about 150 who showed up Wednesday night at Oak Grove High School for a question-and-answer session with state and county health officials were notably subdued.  
"I think that's because everybody knew what was going to happen," Rick Puppo said in an interview at the meeting. "Most people have already got used to the fact, so it's not like it just hit them."

David Correta, a health clinic administrator who has lived in the Los Pasosos neighborhood since August 1981, politely asked officials whether they could offer any guarantees that the problem was now a thing of the past.  
"Some of us are trying to decide whether to stay or move," Correta told Dr. Kenneth Klier, the state health department's deputy director for preventive health services. Klier could offer no such guarantees. The Correta family probably will be moving on.

But others in the neighborhood seemed to take the news in stride. "It seems like it's one of the risks we take in this day and age," said Donna Lum. "How cautious can you be without being paranoid?"

Even so, the Lums have switched to bottled water. "I'm sure the bottled water industry is making a fortune," she said.  
When she became pregnant with Jeremy, now 16 months old, Lum said, "I was really thankful that we were drinking bottled water."

But another neighborhood resident, Mary Lou Eby, said she never has given a thought to using bottled water.

"We breathe so much contamination in the air, so many processed foods have chemicals," said Eby, 41. "To tell you the truth, I didn't worry about the water when they said something was in it."  
She pointed to a relative who died of bone cancer. "She didn't smoke, didn't drink, she ate and took care of herself as well as anybody, had lots of fresh vegetables," Eby said. "If I'm going to get it, I'm going to get it."  
Across the street, Bill and Ruby

By Mitchell Benson and Susan Yochum  
Mercury News Staff Writers

When Pat Ferraro, a Santa Clara Valley Water District board member, showed up Wednesday to attend a closed briefing on the state studies of birth defects and miscarriages, he was turned away.

"Your name isn't on the list," said the state health department employee posted outside the door of the conference room in the basement of the Santa Clara County administration building.

"It's obviously an oversight not to include the water district," Ferraro said as he prepared to walk in the door.

"We'll have to call security," the state health official warned him.

Ferraro eventually got into the briefing. But the

"It was harder to get a ticket for this thing than for the Super Bowl," quipped Jerry Nadler, county deputy district attorney, who also talked his way into the meeting without an invitation.

Although the briefing and subsequent news conferences were held so that officials could release the data, the report itself was tough to get.

The city of San Jose and the county were given only one copy each, aides to Mayor Tom McElroy and Supervisor Susanne Wilson said.

When reporters objected to the lack of copies, they were told the reports would be available in local libraries.

Jim Morgan, a spokesman for the state Department of Health Services, said the distribution of the report was limited, simply because they didn't have enough copies to give to everyone. Instead, officials handed out a 13-page executive summary to virtually



Rick and Susan Puppo, with sons Brian (held by father) and

Schultz agree.  
"If we'd had small children, maybe we would have felt different," said Bill Schultz. "I don't think we'd have known about it if we hadn't seen it in the paper."

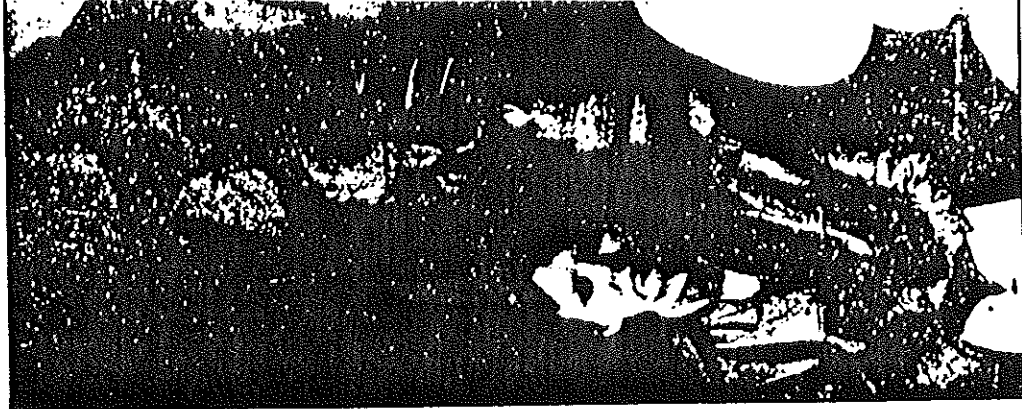
Ruby Schultz said she has kept a goldfish in water she gets straight from the tap for six or seven years. "It hasn't died," she said.

But for Ann and Tony Giannuzzi, life in Los Pasosos will never be the same.

"There's certainly a frustration and a fear that the quality of our lives is being undermined, and we don't know anything about it," said Tony Giannuzzi.

Ann Giannuzzi was president of the Los Pasosos homeowners' association when Fairchild first moved to the neighborhood. "We fought it," she said. "They said it wasn't going to be anything like the moon-astrology that it is."  
"They said it was going to be clean, that there wasn't going to be any pollution."

Staff writer Susan Yochum contributed to this report.



TOXICS CONCERN — Ken Wall and wife, Norma, at left, listen at meeting. W