

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

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 McEnery said the results of the reports are "absolutely staggering in their implications to the health of San

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."

# Health effects of TCA unknown, so some urge banning of solvent

11/7/85

By Mitchell Benson  
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TCA, the solvent that prompted the concern in the Los Paseos neighborhood in South San Jose and then the so-called Fairchild studies released Wednesday, is commonly used in the electronics industry for cleaning and degreasing computer chips.

The solvent's official name is 1,1,1-trichloroethane and it also is referred to as methyl chloroform and methyltrichloromethane.

Electronics industry manufacturers began using large quantities of TCA in the mid- to late 1970s as a replacement for another popular solvent called trichloroethylene, or TCE, which had been linked to cancer.

No definitive connections between exposure to TCA and cancer or birth defects have been established. But the safety of TCA has been called into question recently, particularly in the Santa Clara Valley.

A fact sheet prepared by the Mountain View-based Project on Health and Safety in Electronics says that breathing air contaminated with TCA is the most common method of exposure. Once in the lungs, the project says, TCA crosses into the blood and then to the brain and other parts of the body. TCA also can be absorbed through the skin, but very little actually enters that way unless the skin is cracked or open in some way.

The fact sheet made no mention of ingesting water contaminated by TCA.

California health and water quality officials are allowing the city of San Jose and the privately owned San Jose Water Co. to continue to supply water that

contains low concentrations of TCA to customers in South San Jose. Officials have linked the TCA to a tank on the IBM Corp. property in South San Jose that leaked but has since been removed.

These concentrations of TCA are far below the state "action level" of 200 parts per billion at which officials are required to provide alternative water supplies or take steps to reduce the contamination.

Officials have said that the water is acceptable for drinking, even with low levels of contaminants, because no conclusive evidence links it with health effects.

But environmentalists and several elected officials in the Santa Clara Valley have said that the lack of information on the effects of low concentrations of TCA is precisely why that water shouldn't be supplied to customers until more is known.

Several point to one draft study in particular — though its results have been challenged and are being audited — that concluded that TCA caused cancer in female mice. The same contested study concluded that TCA does not cause cancer in male or female rats.

Ironically, the Great Oaks Water Co. — whose well No. 13, now shut down, has been a focus of the Fairchild studies — is perhaps unique in the Valley because it will not use a well that shows even trace amounts of contaminants.

"In my opinion, TCA causes cancer, and as long as I can somehow manage to serve the customers only water with no contaminants I'll continue to do so," Great Oaks President Betty Roeder said.