

# San Jose Mercury

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## State board tells IBM to intensify ground water cleanup

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State water officials have taken a major step toward forcing IBM to devise a more extensive and expensive plan for monitoring chemical contamination of ground water near its South San Jose plant.

The staff of the state Water Resources Control Board said in a 34-page proposal released Monday that IBM's current monitoring and cleanup plan — approved in December 1984 by the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board — is inadequate.

It says the current plan does not present a complete picture of how far toxic chemicals have spread in underground water supplies around the South San Jose plant or in what concentrations they might be found. IBM blames the contamination, discovered in 1980, on sloppy handling of chemicals and faulty underground pipe fitting.

If the staff's recommendations are followed, IBM would be required to dig many more monitoring wells and to analyze water samples for a greater variety of toxic chemicals, including suspected carcinogens 1,4-dioxane and 1,1-dichloroethylene (DCE).

IBM also would be required to consider alternatives to its current practice of pumping as much as 17.3 million gallons a day of contaminated ground water into Canoas Creek, which empties into San Francisco Bay.

"We are concerned that such large amounts of ground water being pumped, not treated and discharged into a creek, could constitute a waste and unreasonable use of water," the staff wrote. The staff also is concerned that the contaminated water is seeping down through the creek bed into ground water supplies.

The recommendations resulted from appeals of the regional water board's December 1984 decision. Two environment groups — Citizens for a Better Environment and the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition — were joined by San Jose, Santa Clara County and the Santa Clara Valley Water District in filing the appeals.

"I think it is a significant vindication of our position that an awful lot more needs to be done by IBM," said Ted Smith, chairman of the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition.

Ray Kerby, director of environmental programs at IBM's South San Jose plant, said Tuesday of the draft order, "I was a little bit surprised by it. But considering the sensitivity and concern these days . . . it was not completely out of left field. I was slightly disappointed at the results, after working so hard with the regional board."

Kerby said IBM has spent about \$25 million on cleanup activities and \$20 million on improvements at its South San Jose plant to prevent further contamination. Three hundred monitoring and extraction wells have been dug. The staff has scheduled a hearing on its recommendations for March 6 in Sacramento; the state water board is scheduled to take action on them at its March 20 meeting.

Monday's action was the second time in three months it had proposed that the state board overturn a controversial San Francisco Bay regional board decision. In December, the state board staff proposed — and the board agreed Feb. 20 — requiring the regional board to impose stricter limits on the amount of pollutants that industries can dump into the bay.

The controversy over IBM's current efforts centers on one key element:

The regional water board ruled in 1984 that IBM did not need to try to contain or eliminate low levels of the solvents Freon 113 and 1,1,1-trichloroethane (TCA) from drinking water wells and ground water supplies in one area of contamination. That area, in the northern loop of a figure-eight-shaped spread of contamination referred to as Region 2, is north of the intersection of Capitol Expressway and Monterey Road at a natural geological formation called the Edenvale Gap.

Officials of IBM and the regional water board have said a series of extraction wells at Edenvale Gap are pumping out most of the contaminated water as it naturally flows north. In addition, those officials have pointed out that 13 drinking water wells are being monitored for chemicals,

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