

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

AT&T Is Urging Transfers for Some Pregnant Women

A WALL STREET JOURNAL NEWS ROUNDUP

American Telephone & Telegraph Co. said it is "strongly recommending" transfers to all pregnant women employed on its semiconductor production lines.

AT&T said the move comes in response to a Digital Equipment Corp. study released in November that found that women working with acids and gases in fabricating semiconductors had significantly more miscarriages than the statistical norm. Several other companies involved in semiconductor production, including Digital Equipment, have provided their pregnant workers with options ranging from transfers to medical leave. Some companies even have offered transfers to women contemplating pregnancy.

AT&T, New York, has 4,000 production workers at five plants in Pennsylvania, Missouri and Florida. The company said it immediately identified 15 pregnant women who were affected and encouraged them to change jobs; all 15 agreed to transfer. The company said it guaranteed the women jobs of equal pay and seniority.

A spokeswoman said that "in a hypothetical situation," if a pregnant woman refused to switch jobs willingly, she would be laterally transferred. The women would have the option of returning to their old jobs after childbirth, the spokeswoman added.

In Santa Clara, Calif., an Intel Corp. spokesman said the semiconductor maker, when it learned of Digital Equipment's findings in early December, briefed all wafer-fabrication workers. At Intel, he said, "We urge women who are concerned to discuss the matter with their doctor." If pregnant women ask, they can be transferred to another job or put on paid medical leave. Five women—out of the 1,000 women who work in chip fabrication—have chosen one of those options since the briefing.

Intel doesn't expect to change its policy in light of AT&T's decision. "It really comes down to the decision of the woman and her doctor," said the spokesman, although he added, "We are continuing to review this whole situation very closely."

Texas Instruments Inc., one of the world's largest semiconductor makers, said it informed employees in its semiconductor operations of the study when it became public late last year. "We told our employees that we would be responsive in working with anyone who requests a transfer" out of the reportedly hazardous jobs, a spokesman said. The Dallas company hadn't yet received any requests for a transfer, he said.

National Semiconductor Corp., Santa Clara, Calif., told workers of Digital Equipment's findings as soon as it learned of them. The company urges pregnant women to take a prepared packet of information describing chemicals used in work areas to their physicians. If the doctor recommends that a woman not work at that job, "we'll guarantee a job somewhere else during the duration of pregnancy at equal pay." One woman has made such a request since the announcement. If a woman planning to become pregnant gets a similar recommendation from her doctor, a spokesman said, "We'll make every effort to accommodate her" with a transfer.

Advanced Micro Devices Inc., Sunnyvale, Calif., has a similar policy of trying to accommodate women who don't yet know if they're pregnant. For women who are pregnant, the company's "longstanding policy" of transferring workers is similar to National Semiconductor's, except Advanced Micro doesn't guarantee a transfer. Since Digital Equipment's study was released, "We've seen no increased employee concern."

A spokesman for Motorola Inc. said that last month, the company "notified our employees as a precautionary measure of the health report that Digital Equipment made." But the report made little impact on employees, the spokesman for the Schaumburg, Ill.-based maker of semiconductors and electronic equipment said.