

## Chip workers urge toxic chemical ban

By Mitchell Benson  
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A coalition of workers' rights groups and environmentalists called Thursday for the semiconductor industry to ban toxic chemicals, particularly one called Cellosolve, that injure workers' reproductive systems.

Studies have shown that the solvent Cellosolve causes birth defects and the shriveling of testicles in laboratory animals, according to officials with HESIS, the state Health Evalua-

tion System and Information Service.

At a news conference, the coalition also said it would push for an independent long-term study of the health of semiconductor industry workers. And they called on the industry to implement a new policy that emphasizes increasing the safety of the workplace instead of removing threatened workers.

"Somebody's going to have to spend a little bit of money," said Tom Fisher, a 39-year-old

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## Chip workers call for ban on chemicals

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plumber who says the industry's chemicals have made him so sick that visits to high-tech "clean rooms" make him throw up blood and cause him emotional and mental distress.

"They're going to have to improve engineering procedures," Fisher said, "and they're going to have to find safe (chemical) substitutes."

The organizations were responding to a Tuesday article in the Mercury News that reported that American Telephone & Telegraph Co had banned pregnant women from semiconductor chip production lines because of concern about the employees' exposure to chemicals that might cause miscarriages.

The three groups — all based in San Jose — are the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, Injured Workers United and the Santa Clara Center for Occupational Safety and Health. Miscarriages feared

AT&T implemented its tough policy last month after learning about a health study in Massachusetts that reported an increased rate of miscarriages among chip production workers.

Industry and trade association officials have expressed concern about the study's results, but they emphasize that the study did not offer an explanation for the high miscarriage rate. They say follow-up research is needed.

Officials of the Semiconductor Industry Association — a Cupertino-based trade group — point out that an independent industrywide review of health records is now being conducted for the association by a team led by a researcher at the University of California at Davis. A report is expected next

"You need to have this data," said Steve Pedersen, the SIA's director of environmental and OSHA affairs. "We're probably now closer to getting it. But what we know now is still inconclusive. More needs to be done on a broader basis."

### Cellosolve concern

The three groups who sponsored the news conference expressed particular concern about Cellosolve, the toxic solvent commonly used in the chip production process.

In addition to the health problems recorded in laboratory animals, a recent federal health study of a metals plant in Oregon found that men who worked with Cellosolve had a reduced sperm count, according to Will Hevelin, a research analyst for HESIS.

Pedersen, of the SIA, said the industry acknowledges that the substance is extremely toxic. But he said the risk "is zip, for all intents and purposes" if workers wear the proper protective gear, especially gloves, when working with it.

He pointed out that Cellosolve is part of a group of chemicals called glycol ethers that the industry has turned to in recent years to replace another set of chemicals, including xylene, that were phased out largely because they were flammable and their emissions contributed to Santa Clara Valley's ozone air pollution problems.

Pedersen said that in the work area Cellosolve is not volatile, which means the liquid normally does not vaporize into the air and should not be a threat from inhalation.

But Hevelin disagreed. "That's a crock," he said. "In a closed room, an open pan of . . . these chemicals would produce air concentrations far above the workplace exposure limits."