

Union warns of health perils in semiconductor industry

CHICAGO TRIBUNE

BAL HARBOUR, Fla. — A coalition led by the largest U.S. communications union has announced a national campaign to warn of what it believes are health and safety dangers in the semiconductor industry.

The Communications Workers of America, backed by 35 women's safety, legal and environmental groups, said Monday it was "serving notice" on the \$16 billion-a-year industry that "the American people are tired of irresponsible employers who have a total disregard for workers and their communities."

The campaign, unveiled at the AFL-CIO winter meeting here, comes after a spate of recent disclosures about seeming dangers in the industry, which includes nearly 80,000 production workers.

For example, American Telephone & Telegraph Co. announced last month that it had barred pregnant women from its semiconductor production lines after a University of Massachusetts study found a substantially higher rate of miscarriages among workers who produce computer chips.

At the same time, Digital Equipment Corp. "strongly urged" pregnant women to leave such jobs at the company.

The Semiconductor Industry Association, an employer group, advises women to consult their doctors if they become pregnant.

Such a response was deemed inadequate Monday by unionists, safety officials and production workers who came here to press employers with these demands:

- The industry must remove substances known or suspected of causing reproductive hazards.
- The companies must substitute

less toxic chemicals for highly toxic ones and institute engineering controls, such as enclosures, to reduce exposures.

- The industry must develop non-discriminatory, temporary transfers for all potential parents, male or female, with no loss in seniority, pay and other benefits.

- A survey must take place to assess the health effects of workplace exposures.

- When engineering controls aren't in use, personal protection equipment is needed, such as respirators, gloves and goggles.