

# Health study proposed

## Multiyear project would examine semiconductor workers

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Frustrated by the lack of action from federal officials, a local occupational safety expert has organized researchers to put together a long-term study of the health of semiconductor production workers.

Within six months, the group hopes to have a plan for a \$6 million to \$8 million, 10- to 20-year health study. That plan would be submitted to federal occupational health agencies and the semiconductor industry for financing.

"This will be an unsolicited proposal. But we've waited close to 10 years for a solicitation from government, and it's just not going to happen unless it's in the aftermath of a disaster," said Joe LaDou, acting chief of the division of occupational and environmental medicine at the University of California Medical Center in San Francisco. "So, we're going to become more assertive."

LaDou plans to meet today in Berkeley with about 20 industrial

hygienists, university researchers, Santa Clara County health officials and state epidemiologists and statisticians to begin drafting the proposal.

Such a study would examine the health of chip production workers in California and Massachusetts — the two states where LaDou says researchers have shown an interest in such a project. As conceived by LaDou, the researchers would look at a wide variety of ailments and physical hazards, including damage to the central nervous system, organ disease, reproductive problems, cancer and stress.

Today's meeting follows a controversial study on the health of chip workers at a Digital Equipment Corp. plant in Hudson, Mass.

That study found a higher-than-normal rate of miscarriages among production line workers. It also showed a higher than expected rate of general malaise — headaches, nausea and other minor health problems.

An industry task force subsequently took issue with parts of the Digital study, arguing that only 770

employees participated and that health information taken from interviews with employees was not confirmed by medical records or physician interviews.

But the industry group concluded that chip manufacturers need to conduct a follow-up study and the Semiconductor Industry Association has appointed another task force to decide what additional information is needed.

Meanwhile, environmentalists and workers' rights advocates are seeking support from the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors for a state-run health study. The board is expected to consider a resolution on the issue Tuesday.