

Cleanup plan called too slow

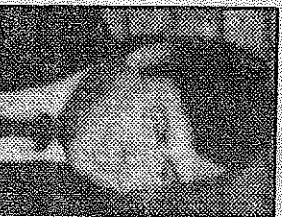
Decontamination
would take 300 years

By Jeff Gottlieb
Mercury News Staff Writer

A leading South Bay environmentalist has criticized a federal plan to take as long as 300 years to clean contaminated groundwater and soil near Moffett Field Naval Air Station in Mountain View.

"This 300-year estimate is just not acceptable," said Ted Smith, executive director of the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition. "That's 30 generations. That's longer than our country has lasted."

Smith, speaking Wednesday night at a public hearing at Crittenden Middle School in Mountain View, said the area is "the most seriously contaminated site in the South Bay."



Soil and groundwater in the area contain more chemicals at higher levels than at any place tested in the South Bay, he said. One cancer-causing chemical, trichloroethylene, or TCE, has been found at 200,000 times the safety level, he said.

Ted Smith

Compared with Love Canal

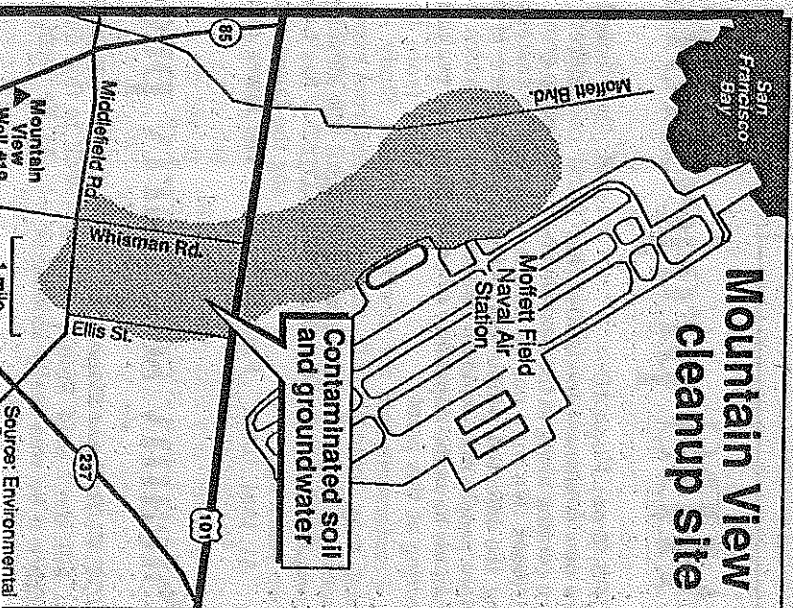
Others at the meeting expressed fears about having a large pool of carcinogenic chemicals sitting so close to them. "I'm concerned about this area becoming another Love Canal," said Steve Chessin, president of the Country Village Homeowners Association. Love Canal is an area of New York state that was devastated by toxic contamination.

Under the Environmental Protection Agency's plan, the cleanup would cost \$50 million to \$56 million over 30 years. However, the work would still leave levels of cancer-causing TCE at nearly 60 times the level of "acceptable risk," according to the federal government. In all, it would take around 300 years to finish the job, according to the EPA, at a cost of \$700 million.

Companies should pay

The companies that used the chemicals are supposed to pay for the cleanup. If they don't, the EPA

See CLEANUP, Page 2B



Moffett-area toxic cleanup plan criticized

CLEANUP, from Page 1B

could take over the job and bill them three times the cost.

The cleanup is a long way from starting. The EPA plan just provides broad outlines. Specifics are expected to start being drawn up next fall. No date has been set for the actual cleanup.

The EPA originally identified five companies as being responsible for the contamination, which was caused by leaking underground storage tanks and pipelines that allowed the chemicals to seep into the ground.

The affected area is bordered by Middlefield and Whisman roads, Ellis Street and the Bayshore Freeway. Three companies — Fairchild Semiconductor Corp., Intel Corp. and Raytheon Co. — agreed to begin interim cleanup and to pay for the feasibility study. Whether the other two companies originally identified, 15 other companies and Moffett Field also are responsible is under investigation.

The contaminated area starts just south of Middlefield Road and extends northwest toward San Francisco Bay. It is one-half mile wide and 1½ miles long.

The bulk of the contamination is in an underwater lake less than 100 feet from the surface, according to the EPA. Wells that provide a small amount of drinking water to Mountain View tap a deeper aquifer and tests have shown no contamination, the EPA said.

The other companies named as potentially responsible for the contamination are NEC Electronics, Silitac Union Carbide, GTE Government Systems, General Instruments, Air Products, Spectra-Physics, Siemens Components, Sobrato Development, Summit Corp. of America, Tracor X-Ray, Genus, Oxbridge, Microwave Modules & Devices, Tri-Data Systems, Xetex, Cermetek Microelectronics and Microscience International.

Comments on the plan may be made by calling the EPA at (800) 251-3075. The EPA has extended the comment period to Jan. 23.