

## Federal safety teams to visit chip makers

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Federal safety officials were to announce today a new inspection program to evaluate how well California's semiconductor manufacturers protect workers from hazardous materials.

The announcement came less than a month after emergency crews in Redwood City blew up 55 cylinders of gas used in semiconductor manufacture to prevent an accidental explosion.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration's new program was planned long before the intentional destruction last month of canisters of silane gas, which is commonly used in semiconductor manufacturing. The cylinders were blown up because officials feared they were contaminated with other gases that made them explosive.

"But that certainly motivated us to get (the program) going a little faster," Frank Strasheim, OSHA's regional administrator, said Wednesday. "This just caused us to expedite it."

Under the OSHA program specially trained inspection teams

from seven OSHA offices in California will make surprise visits to integrated circuit production plants that have 11 or more workers. The inspections began Monday.

Employers will be cited if any violations of federal job safety and health standards are found.

The program also includes a toll-free phone line for workers to call with complaints and concerns. The semiconductor industry uses a wide variety of toxic gases and liquids to etch microscopic circuits onto silicon wafers. Almost half of the nation's 309 chip production plants are in California, according to Dataquest Inc., a San Jose market research firm.

OSHA officials acknowledged that the industry has a comparatively low rate of worker injuries.

"And I suspect the companies are doing a good job," Strasheim said. "But I want to find out for sure. And I want to find out if that's the case throughout the entire industry."

The OSHA phone number is 800-648-1003.