

Foes of Toxics Sic New Law On Silicon Valley Firms

By Elliot Diring
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A new law that forces companies to reveal their toxic emissions struck home in Silicon Valley yesterday as environmentalists challenged industry to cut its chemical releases by 90 percent.

The demand was issued by the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, which said that 25 of the valley's biggest manufacturers, by their own admission, annually are spewing more than 12 million pounds of chemicals into the air and water.

Major electronics and defense firms such as IBM, Hewlett-Packard and Lockheed are among the largest sources of the legal discharges, which industry spokesmen said they are already doing their best to reduce.

The emissions figures were drawn from reports filed by the companies under a new federal law that for the first time requires businesses to disclose publicly their chemical releases.

In effect for only a month, the law is already being felt nationwide. Just as its supporters had hoped, the measure is putting reams of detailed information into the public realm, where it is being seized upon by groups bent on industry reforms.

"Everyone knew this stuff was going on, but it wasn't documented. Now, here it is from the horses' mouth," said Silicon Valley coalition leader Ted Smith. "We're hoping this will wake people up to what's going on and create a groundswell to get these companies to stop using the air as an open sewer."

Ideally, Smith said, the coalition would like the emissions stopped altogether.

"If 'zero tolerance' can be the policy of the federal government when it comes to drugs," he said, "we think it can certainly be a goal for protecting people from toxic discharges."

However, since "zero tolerance" would be impossible without shutting industry down, Smith said,

TOXICS IN SILICON VALLEY

Largest industrial sources of chemicals released into the air and water among companies that have filed Title III disclosure reports

In pounds per year

Advanced Micro Devices	2,745,000
Hewlett-Packard	2,025,253
IBM	1,874,530
National Semiconductor	1,219,303
Signetics	971,641
UTC	970,415
Lockheed	710,611
FMC	313,544
Linear Technology	233,800
Varian	169,588
Intel	143,365
Westinghouse	117,200

Source: Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition

ra County Manufacturing Group said the new disclosure law is just one of the things spurring companies to find substitutes for toxic chemicals.

"Frankly, the whole liability issue is what really drives the companies to reduce all these things," she said. "The companies have really been scrutinizing what they're emitting to the environment and they're putting in hundreds of millions of dollars of new controls."

The disclosure law is one of a growing number of "right-to-know" measures. It was pushed through Congress last year by a broad coalition of grass-roots groups battling toxic chemicals in communities nationwide.

Initially, disclosures were required from manufacturers with 10 or more employees handling at least 75,000 pounds of chemicals last year. The limit drops to 50,000 pounds this year and 25,000 pounds in 1989.

The law covers more than 300 chemicals, and although many have been shown to cause cancer, birth defects and other health problems in laboratory animals, there is considerable debate about the health effects at levels to which the general public is exposed.

Although most companies are quietly filing their disclosure reports at state and federal offices, others like Monsanto are taking more initiative to avoid being put on the defensive.

Monsanto took out newspaper ads showing its emissions and gave the data directly to citizens groups in the communities where it has plants.

"The more the public understands and the more they're involved, the better they understand where we're coming from," said George Lemos, environmental manager at a Monsanto plastics plant in Springfield, Mass.

"It goes both ways," Lemos added. "We need to understand what the public's expectations are and we strive to live up to those. And you can't do that without communication."

local manufacturers should follow the example of the Monsanto Corp., which has pledged a 90 percent reduction in its air emissions nationwide. "We're saying that that seems like a good standard to hold the other companies to."

Spokesmen for the valley's manufacturers said they already are trying to curb their use and discharge of toxic chemicals, but that a 90 percent reduction is unrealistic.

"They're comparing apples and oranges," said Lee Neal, director of safety and health for the Semiconductor Industry Association.

"It's very difficult to arbitrarily say this company's good and this company's bad based on the amount they're reducing their effluent," said Neal. "Each one of these companies is very interested in coming up with significant reductions, but they have to be done realistically."

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