

# San Francisco Examiner

August 3, 1988

## Silicon Valley firms found to emit toxic air pollutants

Report singles out IBM for harming the Earth's ozone

By Jane Kay  
SENIOR ENVIRONMENTAL WRITER

Silicon Valley electronics firms, mainly IBM, are discharging ozone-damaging chemicals into the air and should immediately reduce them to protect the Earth's ozone layer, a San Jose environmental group said.

Each year, about 15 million pounds of Freon, one of the most common chlorofluorocarbons, is emitted by IBM, which uses it as a cleaning solvent in the manufacture of disk drives, according to a report by the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition.

In all, 25 Santa Clara County companies emitted a total of 12 million pounds of toxic air pollutants over a year's time, says the report, which documents company disclosure statements required by the federal government as of July 1.

IBM officials, faced with criticism as the report was released Tuesday, said they planned to cut emissions by 30 percent at the end of next year.

"That's not good enough," said Ted Smith, director of the coalition. "We want 50 percent cut every year with 90 percent cut in four years."

"The goal is for zero tolerance. If we have zero tolerance for drugs, we can have it for poisonous chemicals in the air."

The study comes at a time when the Environmental Protection Agency has ordered a 50 percent reduction over the next 10 years in the production of CFCs, which are blamed for piercing holes in the ozone layer.

Environmentalists criticize those cutbacks as not tough enough. They fall short of an international treaty that calls for a reduction by half in CFC production by the year 1988.

The largest Freon dischargers mentioned in the coalition's report are Hewlett-Packard Co., Lockheed Missiles and Space Co., National Semiconductor Corp., Spectra-Physics Inc., Signetics Corp., Varian Associates and United Technology Corp.

IBM's large facility in San Jose is responsible for all but 367,200 pounds of the nearly 1.9 million pounds of Freon emissions reported in Santa Clara County, according to the environmental group.

IBM spokeswoman Deborah Coppola said: "We've been working on Freon reduction for some time. We've been working on trying to find CFC substitutes." In some instances, they're substituting detergents and water for the cleaner.

At Hewlett Packard, press officer Marlene Somsak said it used Freon as a degreaser to clean circuit boards and silicon wafers. "We're fully committed to reducing CFC use and emissions in the company's manufacturing processes to help preserve the Earth's ozone layer," she said.

At a Boise plant, the company eliminated CFC-based sprays as cleaning solvents and modified the operation to reduce emissions.

The coalition's Smith praised Monsanto Chemical Co. for disclosing it emitted 20 million pounds of CFCs worldwide and for pledging a 90 percent cutback. IBM was unable to provide its worldwide CFC emission.

Under the federal Superfund's toxic waste cleanup legislation, businesses that use more than 10,000 pounds of chemicals a year were required to make their emissions public by July 1.

The coalition based its findings on the emission reports of 25 South Bay companies, which emitted a total of 34 chemicals, including toluene, sulfuric acid, methyl ethyl ketone and other harmful chemicals. "The environmental group also is calling for the EPA to control toxic chemicals in the air. Just seven chemicals are now regulated.

"The pollution is largely legal but completely immoral," Smith said. "The industry has had a free ride to use the air as an open sewer for the waste discharges. We're calling on them to reduce discharges and to reduce their addiction to these toxic chemicals."

The thin ozone gas layer floating 15 to 25 miles up in the Earth's upper stratosphere — not to be confused with the ground-level air pollutant ozone — shields people against cancer-causing ultraviolet rays. It also shields the Earth's surface from heat, which burns crops and causes drought.

CFC compounds also are used as refrigerant coolants and agents to make plastic foam.

They are blamed for a 2½ percent decline in the ozone layer in past 25 years. Every time there's a one percent decrease, skin cancer cases grow by 43,000 in the United States, according to federal health statistics.

Scientists estimate that if CFCs and other damaging chemicals were banned, it would take 100 years for the ozone layer to recover.