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Editorials

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## Breathing room for safety

Santa Clara County cities should adopt an ordinance regulating toxic gas

**R**EPRESENTATIVES of Silicon Valley industries say the model toxic-gas ordinance for Santa Clara County cities is expensive and unnecessary. "Expensive," as any budget manager knows, is a matter of priorities. Unnecessary? Check the recent news:

- Last week 400 employees at a large semiconductor manufacturing plant were evacuated after some arsine gas escaped.
- A week earlier, 12 workers at a small semiconductor plant in Santa Clara were evacuated after a container of poisonous gas was accidentally disconnected.
- Two months before that, silane gas caught fire at a Sunnyvale chip plant. Four employees were injured; everyone within a half-mile radius was evacuated.

- Six months before that, employees were evacuated from a Gilroy chemical plant, for the third time in three years, to escape leaked toxic gas.

- Last March, emergency crews blew up 55 cylinders of a "bad batch" of gases used in semiconductor manufacture because safety officials feared what would happen if the gases were used.

And the list goes on. Which isn't surprising, given the Silicon Valley's distinction of having more toxic gas stored than any other region in the country. Local companies use more than a million cubic feet of toxic gases each year.

After three years of negotiations among the county's fire chiefs, industry and city governments, the ordinance is ready for the cities' approval.

The ordinance won't stop accidents from happening, but it can decrease the likelihood of injury. So far the valley has escaped a toxic-gas disaster. Let's not press our luck. We urge the county's city councils to approve the toxic-gas ordinance.