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Toxic emissions down, industry says

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An industry group's study says that 24 major companies in Santa Clara County released 43 percent less toxic pollutants last year.

But the director of a local environmental group, while acknowledging industry reductions are a step in the right direction, said he believes the study's claims are exaggerated.

The study was prepared by the Santa Clara County Manufacturing Group. It says the reduction reflects the efforts of the corporations — which produce 70 percent of the monitored pollutants created in the county — to use any means possible to reduce the release of pollutants.



Smith

The industry group said the amount of pollutants released into the county's air, land and water dropped from 6.6 million pounds in 1987 to 3.76 million last year. (Neither figure reflects the millions of tons of sodium sulfate, a salt the federal Environmental Protection Agency recently removed from the list of pollutants that must be reported.)

Ted Smith executive director of the Silicon Valley

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oxics Coalition, an environmental group that monitors such issues, termed the numbers released by the industry group "just nuts."

Smith attributed the bulk of the companies' reductions to changes in the way they calculate the amount of a given pollutant that they produce.

"To claim nearly a 50 percent reduction in the amount of chemicals they discharge simply does not reflect the stage they are at," Smith said. "They (local industry) are very early in addressing these concerns."

Nonetheless, Smith said he thought the report indicated "real progress both in substance and in terms of policy."

Several years ago, he said, the industry group resisted efforts even to discuss reducing emissions at their source. Back then, he said, industry maintained that many of the manufacturing procedures that created the pollutants were too complex for it to be economically feasible to change them to reduce

wastes. Now, industry says it's been able to lower its pollution numbers because of such reductions at the source.

Jacqueline Bogard, director of environmental programs for the industry group, agreed that some part of the reduction stemmed from changes in calculations and more accurate monitoring, but she said she didn't believe these were major factors.

Bogard also said she didn't believe drops in production at any of the 24 companies' 41 manufacturing facilities in the county were a major factor.

The 24 companies include most of the area's leading semiconductor and computer manufacturers. The toxic chemicals, later released as waste, are used in producing everything from blueprints to integrated circuits and rocket fuel.

Beginning last year, Congress ordered industry to gather the pollution statistics to give the public a better idea of what chemicals are used in their communities. But no analysis has been done to determine the health risk to the public these released chemicals pose.