

Peninsula / State

Mountain View • Los Altos • Los Altos Hills • Palo Alto

Navy drags toxic anchor

Environmental leader criticizes Moffett cleanup effort

By Michael Shear
Mercury News Staff Writer

The Navy is "dragging its feet" in the cleanup of 19 toxic waste sites at Moffett Field, the leader of a Santa Clara County environmental group charged at an open house at the base Monday.

"They don't start actually cleaning up until 1995," said Ted Smith, the executive director of the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition. "They have known about these sites for

years and years."

Fuels, solvents and other chemicals have been dumped or stored in leaking tanks on the base — which is considered one of the worst toxic sites in the country — over the past 55 years. The Navy has identified 19 places on the base where contamination has occurred.

Officials at Moffett Field Naval Air Station say the cleanup is proceeding at a pace mandated by state and federal guidelines.

"We are in a mechanism that the (federal) Environmental Protection Agency and the state of California set up," said Michael Cain, Moffett's environmental division director. "From here forward, we are locked into a process. That's why it seems to take so long."

Cain said Moffett is about to complete the first phase of its investigation into contamination on the base and will begin a second

See CLEANUP, Page 2B



Ted Smith
... Coalition leader

Moffett defends pace of toxic cleanup effort

CLEANUP, from Page 1B

phase in November. Final reports and plans will be completed by the end of 1993 and cleanup of underground water will begin in 1995. He had no estimate how long the cleanup would take.

Smith called the schedule "pretty darn slow" and said the Navy's pace may impede the cleanup of other nearby sites.

"There needs to be some coordination" between Moffett and companies involved in cleanup, he said. "But at this rate, Moffett is slowing everyone down."

Cain said it is necessary to study contamination of aquifers before attempting to clean them up.

"The overall aquifer restoration takes a lot of time," he said. Pro-

ceeding without specific plans for the cleanup "could make the problem worse," he said.

In addition, he said the Navy is continuing to remove new sources of contamination — such as storage tanks and old water wells — as they are found.

The Navy held the open house at the Chief Petty Officer's club near the base to offer a chance to talk to the people coordinating the cleanup for the Navy. About 100 people showed up at the afternoon meeting.

Denise Muller, who graduated in May from San Jose State University with a degree in environmental studies, said the cleanup should not take so long.

"I think water is so key to this area," she said.