

# PROFILES

- PHASING OUT OZONE DEPLETERS
- LOCAL LAWS BAN CFCs

## PHASING OUT OZONE DEPLETERS

### BACK TO BASICS: SOAP REPLACES CFCs AT IBM'S SAN JOSE PLANT

The last time you took a shower, you were in direct contact with one of the world's most welcome environmental products: warm soapy water. While soap is hardly a glamorous technological invention, officials at International Business Machines (IBM) will tell you it's an effective stand-in for chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). This is not something you would have heard from IBM three years ago. It was relentless citizen pressure that convinced the giant company to consider the merits of soap.

#### *Silicon Valley CFC Elimination Campaign*

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**Impact:** Global

**Start up:** 1989

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In 1989 IBM's sprawling disk drive factory in San Jose, California, was a formidable emitter of ozone-depleting chemicals: number one in the state, number three in the nation. Each year, the factory released more than 1.5 million pounds of CFCs into the atmosphere. The chemicals were used to clean circuit boards and other electronic components.

Environmental groups in the area learned of these emissions through the first Toxics Release Inventory. The Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition led a broad-based assault on this monstrous threat to the ozone layer. Ted Smith, Executive Director of the Coalition, describes how a number of environmental groups in the area organized an intensive protest on Earth Day, 1989. "Over 2,000 activists marched to the IBM facility chanting 'Hey hey, ho ho, CFCs have got to go!' The protesters were turned away at the front gate by a security officer who was visibly shaken. With seven television crews looking on, leaders asked IBM to sign a "Good Neighbor Agreement" promising a CFC phaseout. All to no avail."

But the winds of change were blowing. A few months later, USA Today ran a front-page story describing the plant's CFC emissions. Environmental groups moved quickly to capitalize on the media attention, holding a series of press conferences to protest IBM's inaction. The pressure worked. By September, IBM presented a new position on its CFC policy: CFCs would be eliminated completely by 1993. Already, IBM has reduced its CFC emissions by more than 95%.

The new process is delightfully elegant. Instead of being cleaned with CFCs, electronic components are dipped in warm soapy water and carried by a moving track through what resembles a miniature car wash, where they are rinsed and dried with hot air. To IBM's surprise, the new process will pay for itself in three years and save money thereafter. "I've never seen a project with this level of grassroots motivation by the engineering team," exclaims Dr. June Anderson, the plant's manager of environmental programs. "They became convinced that this was the right thing to do."

Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition is pleased with the campaign's results and is working to build on its success. "We want other companies to follow IBM's example," says Smith. Working with other environmental groups, the Coalition is using IBM's conversion to counter the conventional wisdom that environmentally sound practices are too complicated and expensive, or not technically feasible. For IBM all it took was soap, water, and a little arm-twisting.

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