

21 pollution lawsuits aimed at Westinghouse

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Neighbors of Westinghouse Electric Corp. in Sunnyvale have filed suit in Santa Clara County Superior Court asking for compensation for possible loss of property value, and for fear of health problems from toxic chemicals that have seeped from the plant into groundwater under their homes.

In a news conference Thursday morning in the front yard of the home of Pat Caster and his wife, Bonnie Bradshaw, attorney Dick Alexander said 21 separate suits — to be tried as one — have been filed.

One suit was filed by Bradshaw and Caster, two founders of Victory Village-Murphy Park Homeowners Association, which has been attempting to force a speedy

and complete removal of polychlorinated biphenyls and other toxic chemicals that leaked from tanks at the company at Hendy and Fair Oaks avenues. The contamination was discovered in 1981 and has seeped into an upper aquifer.

The "plume" of water laced with toxics has drifted under Victory Village, a 1943 subdivision of 150 homes northeast of Westinghouse. Two of the plaintiffs in the suit are from the other side of the plant, in Murphy Park.

Westinghouse officials could not be reached immediately for comment.

Alexander said a jury will be asked to set a "dollar amount to compensate people in the neighborhood for loss of property values and health fears due to the negligent and intentional actions of Westinghouse."

He said Westinghouse, in allowing the chemicals to seep into the neighborhood, "actually trespassed" onto the property of the homeowners.

PCBs and some of the other chemicals, particularly benzene, are cancer-causing, Alexander stressed.

Alexander wouldn't say whether the suit will continue if Westinghouse removes all the contaminants quickly.

As he spoke, some of the residents, men and women, young and old, stood in a semicircle behind him. Two of the women held children in their arms. An oak table from the home bore copies of the complaint and news releases.

Bradshaw said she and Caster moved three years ago from Texas.

"The equity in our house in Dallas was enough for 5 percent of the down payment on this house. We feel we've lost that," Bradshaw said. "We don't feel safe in our home. We don't feel we could have children. We like the neighborhood. We would like to stay here and get Westinghouse to clean it up."