

tations. Otherwise, it allows the local areas to freely choose their own structure. According to David Haun, director of the Department of Public Safety the SERC does not review the membership of the individual LEPCs. "We don't really look at the community or environmental representation. We go by what the judge recommends." According to Jim Makris, director of Chemical Emergency Preparedness and Prevention for the

EPA, in a letter to Willie, Maldonado and Erwin on May 17, "it is clear that Congress intended that the preparedness for, prevention of and response to chemical accidents be in the hands of the people who will be affected should a chemical accident happen." On the other hand EPA denies oversight responsibility, sending the enforcement back to the SERC, the LEPCs and the governor. In this case, David Haun talked to Ray

Holbrook, who talked to the Gary Jackson, who talked to the newly created "official" membership, and returned to the judge with a new list of members. "No one talked to Janet Willie. According to Judge Holbrook, enough time has gone by now "to where they should have done something. I'll look into it, but you know its just not one of the most important things I've got going."

Semi-Toxic: Reduction at the Source

Negotiations that could lead to safer chemical processes for use by the microelectronics industry opened last month between an unusual coalition of Austin citizen, labor and environmental groups, the National Campaign for Responsible Technology (CRT) and Sematech, a Defense Department-subsidized semiconductor research consortium. The meeting, 18 months in the making, comes at a particularly opportune moment. Sematech now three years into its five-year funding cycle,

"Sematech II," in preparation for what will probably be a heated funding debate in Congress this fall.

An industry research collective made up of 14 semiconductor manufacturers, Sematech was originally designed to provide member corporations with high-tech research needed to strengthen their "competitiveness" in the world micro-chip market. Sematech receives over \$100 million annually in government subsidies for research. CRT, a national coalition of labor and environmental groups, has chosen Sematech as its first major target in a broad based effort to bring issues of worker safety and environmental protection to those at the cutting edge of technological development for production. CRT includes organizers from the Southwest Organizing Project, the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, Jobs With Justice, Asian Immigrant Women's Advocates and others. It organized its first conference in Austin last year, bringing Texas organizers an array of information and experience with the hazards of the high-tech industry.

High-Tech Toxics and Sematech

Microelectronics has been labeled a "clean industry," but that phrase is misleading. The semiconductor industry produces integrated circuits that are hundreds of times smaller than the diameter of a hair. A speck of dust or any kind of particle could destroy the carefully etched surface. Within the industry, the term "clean" refers not to freedom from chemical hazards, but to "clean rooms," so named because the ultra-filtered, rapidly circulating air contains no particles, although it *does* contain the toxic vapors from solvents. Clean rooms are clean for the product, not for the workers.

Typically, chip production requires the use of solvents that irritate the eyes, skin and membranes, and with chronic or acute exposure can cause liver and kidney damage. "Dopants," chemicals used to change the conductivity of the silicon, can be lethal in even minute doses. Workers may encounter lead, tungsten, cadmium or arsenic, as well as corrosive acids and gasses that instantly explode on contact with air. At a town meeting in the Montopolis Community Center adjacent to Sematech, over 50 area residents spoke with labor and environmental activists from California, New Mexico and the east

coast about the costs and hazards of the "clean industry."

At a March 28 public hearing before the California Regional Water Quality Control Board in Sunnyvale, Water Quality officials acknowledged that a toxic-solvent spill from Sematech member Advanced Micro Devices and IBM might be evaporating into homes through basements and crawl spaces. According to Ted Smith of the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition (SVTC), many Silicon Valley residents had not been informed of the spill or of the health hazards posed by the airborne solvents. The board will hold hearings on the spill clean-up in June.

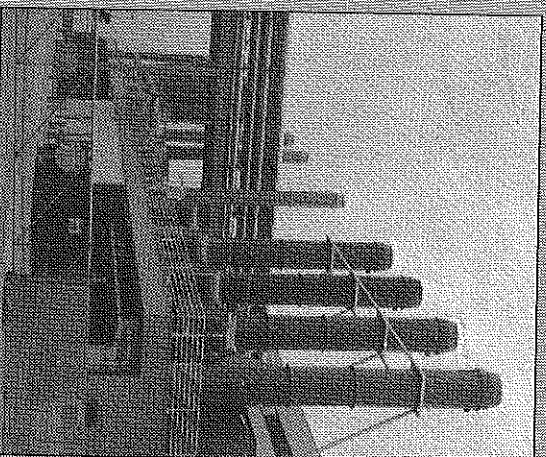
According to the SVTC, Santa Clara, California has 29 EPA Superfund sites, the highest density of sites in the U.S, and 23 of those were related to high tech, individual site clean-up estimates for semiconductor factory spills range from \$1-10 million. CRT also reported that more than 150 leaks and spills have already contaminated the aquifer beneath the city and over 200 of its drinking water wells.

Mike Guerrero of the Southwest Organizing Project in Albuquerque has worked with the Toxic Victims Assistance Corp., fighting GTE for access to health care for people poisoned by chronic solvent exposure. "Five hundred people in Albuquerque... are dying," said Guerrero. "Living with numbness in different parts of their bodies. Children are born with solvents in their blood. People are afraid and the system has let them down. GTE picked up and moved to Juarez, Mexico, but the people have to face the aftermath." In 1987 GTE settled out of court a suit charging "115 combined claims of occupational disablement due to toxic chemical exposure at GTE." Another suit remains pending, with nearly 500 plaintiffs, against the chemical manufacturers themselves.

A 1985 California health department study revealed a birth defect rate in the Farchild/IBM area of San Jose three times the national average, and worker illness for employees of the high tech industry are reported to the California Division of Industrial Relations at three times the rate for manufacturing as a whole. In addition, an epidemiological study at Digital Equipment Corp. found a miscarriage rate among production workers twice the national average, according to Smith.

A much younger Texas semiconductor industry has already made this one of the top high-tech manufacturing states, with industrial centers in Austin, Houston, Dallas and several rural counties. Here, local chambers of commerce and others still boost high-tech as a "clean industry" and subsidize it to promote "competitiveness."

According to Smith, Sematech is in a unique position to develop corrective technologies for the environmental and safety problems



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