

**E****TUESDAY** . . . .

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# BUSINESS

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**TALKING BUSINESS**

“We’re trying to take the position that competitiveness is not just machinery and semiconductors but the entire economy.”

MARTIN BAILY,  
economist

## Chip makers limit exposure to two chemicals

BY SCOTT THURM AND TOM SCHMITZ  
Mercury News Staff Writers

Semiconductor manufacturers Monday said they have reduced use of two chemicals linked to miscarriages in a new study and had taken steps to allow women who are or might become pregnant to avoid exposure.

But while some companies have identified replacements for both of the suspect chemicals, others seemed in no hurry to make changes. Environmental and labor activists criticized the industry for not responding faster to laboratory studies that linked the two chemicals to reproductive hazards a decade ago.

The chemicals — diethylene glycol dimethyl ether and ethylene glycol monoethyl

### Materials linked to miscarriages in study

ether acetate — have been used widely in the process of etching circuits on semiconductors. In a study that became public Monday, workers exposed to the chemicals in the chemical-mixing and solvent-applying areas of two IBM plants were found to have miscarriages at twice the rate of their co-workers.

In response, officials at the IBM plant in South San Jose, where the chemicals are used to make magnetic recording heads, said they would discontinue use of both substances by the end of next month, adopting substitutes the company has been experimenting with since 1989.

“There was enough information on the animal studies that while you wouldn’t go out and replace them wholesale, you would have ongoing studies looking for replacements,” said June Anderson, the plant’s environmental director.

Other chip makers disagreed, saying not even the new study had proven a link between the chemicals and miscarriages. “It’s too early to start calling for drastic changes until there’s something more definitive,” said Dick Muldoon, spokesman for AT&T Microelectronics in New Jersey.

Several companies said they were waiting for the results of a much larger worker-

safety study, commissioned by the Semiconductor Industry Association and expected by the end of the year.

Association spokesman Tom Beermann said use of the two chemicals has declined in recent years, although he could not provide statistics. Several companies said they had switched to other chemicals because the substitutes worked better, although they weren’t sure the replacements were any safer.

Silicon Valley’s major chip makers use only ethylene glycol monoethyl ether acetate, commonly called Cellosolve acetate, and said they would increase precautions for women of child-bearing age. Intel

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Corp., which has allowed employees to transfer out of potentially hazardous areas with a doctor’s note since 1968, said it dropped

the doctor requirement and would let employees transfer freely.

“We didn’t want our employees to feel there was any roadblock,” said company spokesman Howard High. But since 5,000 Intel

factory workers were told the results of the IBM study last month, only six have asked for more information, and none has requested a transfer, High said.

Amanda Hawes, director of the Santa Clara Occupational Safety

and Health Program, applauded that change; in the past, she said, workers at some companies were pressured to provide doctors’ notes allowing them to continue working around hazardous chemicals.

Hawes called it “tragic” that companies had waited so long to make changes, when industry memoranda first warned of reproductive hazards of the etching chemicals in 1982.

Ultimately, workplace-safety

advocates said, shunting some employees to another room is not acceptable. “You have to ban the chemicals, not the workers,” said Ted Smith, executive director of the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition.