

# CITY & STATE

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## Groups applaud Sematech funds decision

By Scott W. Wright  
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A coalition of environmental groups on Monday lauded Congress' decision to earmark \$10 million in Sematech funding for environmental research and urged the consortium's corporate backers to match the amount.

The groups, from high-tech havens such as Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico and Texas, also launched a campaign to try and win environmental and worker-related concessions from the semiconductor industry.

"What we are asking for is not for industries to move out, but to develop clean and safe practices," said Antonio Diaz, co-chairman of one of the groups, People Organized in Defense of Earth and its Resources.

"We know the importance of the electronics industry now and in the

### Environmentalists launch campaign to win concessions from semiconductor industry

future," he said. "But in order to remain viable, we also need to have an industry that is not hurting the people's health and ruining the environment."

In an unusual move, Congress mandated on Saturday that 10 percent of next year's \$100 million budget for Sematech, an Austin-based computer chip consortium, be used to develop an environmentally safe manufacturing process.

In addition, lawmakers directed Sematech to "consult with appropriate environmental and labor organizations."

Sematech spokesman Robert Price said Monday the consortium's backers will not put up another \$10 million because they already have pledged \$100 million

and pollution prevention research "is already part of the process."

Ted Smith, executive director of the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, a grass-roots environmental group in San Jose, Calif., hailed the congressional mandate as "historic and unprecedented."

"It gets us from having a toe in the door to a seat at the table," Smith said. "We will be able to sit down with Sematech and define what environmentally safe manufacturing should mean in the semiconductor industry."

"If we can get Sematech to develop new solutions at the front end, it will have a tremendous benefit all across the region," he said. "We want the solutions before the problems begin to occur."

The groups, including the Campaign for Responsible Technology and members of the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice, said the industry, long called one of the cleanest and safest, has a "dark side."

The groups said they will demand changes, such as uniform environmental and safety standards. They said their yearlong study of the industry reveals a pattern of pollution, poor treatment of workers and "economic coercion."

For example:

■ Smith said San Jose-area high-tech industries have polluted ground water at 150 sites in Santa Clara County, 29 of which are Superfund sites, and contaminated 50 drinking water wells.

■ Aida Franco with the Southwest Organizing Project in Albuquerque, N.M., said high-tech companies have promised hun-

See Environmentalists, B3

## Environmentalists applaud Sematech funds decision

Continued from B1

dreds of jobs for locals but in reality "imported" most workers from out of state.

■ Franco said surveys and government records reveal an alarming rate of health problems among low-level minority workers in the semiconductor industry, including memory loss, brain damage and reproductive damage.

■ Tynec Enrique of the Maricopa County Organizing Project in Phoenix, Ariz., said a Motorola facility that polluted ground water promised to clean the mess up, then billed taxpayers for part of the cost.

Tom Beerman, a spokesman for the Semiconductor Industry Association in San Jose, said some of the allegations were ridiculous and

others were based on inaccurate or outdated information.

"The industry has a very diversified work force, treats its workers extremely well and is very progressive in terms of worker benefits and safety," Beerman said. "I think a lot of what you are hearing is coming from groups that have a political ax to grind."