

## Sematech gets money for environment

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The U.S. House of Representatives has thrown a new wrinkle in Sematech's quest for federal funds. The House has earmarked \$10 million that the Austin-based research consortium would have to spend on developing environmentally safe manufacturing methods for microchips.

The money was part of a \$100 million funding authorization for Sematech in the next fiscal year, \$20 million more than recommended by the Bush administra-

\$10 million budgeted for safe chip-making methods

tion. The authorization was approved by the House Armed Services Committee and included in the \$270 billion defense authorization bill passed by the House last week.

The Senate is expected to take up its version of the defense authorization bill this month.

The \$100 million federal contribution, if approved by Congress, would amount to about half of Sematech's budget next year. The re-

mainder comes from the consortium's 12 member companies. Sematech employs about 700 people in Austin and funds related research at various universities, chip equipment suppliers and member companies.

Sematech officials say they have no quarrel with setting aside part of their federal support dollars for "green" technology. In fact, they say the consortium has already devoted considerable resources

Sematech has claimed several environmental accomplishments in its research so far, including the development of a process that uses solid arsenic in place of the far more toxic arsine gas in chip-making. Arsenic is a "deposit," an impurity introduced into a silicon wafer to alter its electrical characteristics.

Other advances include new tools that use sulfur hexafluoride gas in the etching process in place of hydrogen chloride and ozone-depleting chlorofluorocarbon gases, and the use of anhydrous

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Confined from CS hydrogen fluoride cleaning in place of hydrofluoric acid.

Sematech also claims to process 97 percent of the acids it uses — a process that saves money and minimizes toxic disposal problems.

In addition, the consortium is working on a \$20 million plasma etch program this year that promises to replace the current chemically intensive wet-etching process for microchip circuits with the use of a far more efficient mixture of ionized gases.

Sematech officials said they learned that the House Armed Services Committee introduced the \$10 million environmental research set-aside as a way of pleasing the Defense Department, which the House wants to take a more active stance in dealing with its environmental problems.

But a group of labor and envi-

**"We think we've been doing that all along,"**  
Buddy Price,  
Sematech spokesman

gations of hydrochloric acid at an Advanced Micro Devices plant resulted in 37 workers being treated at area hospitals for respiratory problems, skin and eye irritation and nausea.

"This is a good beginning," said Rand Wilson, a Boston-based coordinator for the group, who said his organization will now push to get similar language included in the Senate authorization bill.

"There is a chorus of groups that have been pressuring the Pentagon to be more environmentally sensitive," Wilson said. "We're only one little squeak of that, but we're the squeak that got (environmental funding) into Sematech."

Sematech officials see it differently. They say that House committee staff members who wrote the authorization language never heard of Wilson's group.

romental activists, the Campaign for Responsible Technology, also claimed that its lobbying efforts for special environmental research funding was a primary reason for the special \$10 million provision in the authorization bill.

That group, among others, has called for the semiconductor industry to cut back dramatically on its use of toxic materials in the manufacturing process. Potential problems in the heavy use of toxics were brought home to Austin last month when a spill of less than 2