

# Toxics group seeks to monitor cleanup at Moffett

## *Grant sought to pay for watch dog on project*

BY DAVID BANK  
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Are toxic solvents from Moffett Field harming the wetlands of San Francisco Bay? Is Mountain View's drinking water supply safe? Is the haggling between the Navy and three private companies slowing the toxic cleanup effort?

After years of trying to get straight answers to those questions, the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition wants to call in expert assistance.

The coalition is seeking a \$200,000 grant from the Environmental Protection Agency to hire an environmental consultant to help it monitor the cleanup efforts at Moffett Field Naval Air Station and three privately owned sites nearby that are known as the Middlefield-Ellis-Whisman Study Area.

The underground toxic plumes from the four sites have merged into "a big toxic soup," creating the most technically and politically complicated cleanup problem in all of Silicon Valley, said Ted Smith, the coalition's executive director.

"If they generated as much cleanup as they generated paper, we'd be in a much better position," Smith said. "We need to be

able to compete with them on the technical level, to focus people's attention and keep the community informed."

The coalition has applied for a "technical assistance grant" under the EPA's community relations program. The program provides for grants to community groups of up to \$50,000 for each site on the agency's Superfund list of national cleanup priorities, or \$200,000 for the four sites. The coalition is the only group seeking the funding for the sites, according to EPA officials.

The three private companies responsible for the cleanup — Raytheon Co., Intel Corp., and Fairchild Semiconductor Corp. (which is no longer in business) — have been arguing with the Navy over their shares of the cleanup costs. Last month, the parties agreed in principle to cooperate on the cleanup effort and settle the cost dispute later, Smith said.

"But until you see the stuff in writing, it doesn't mean much," Smith said. "That's all the more reason why we need to have technical people involved, so there will be a public-interest position involved in those negotiations."

Another issue of concern to the coalition is the order in which the

cleanup, which is set to begin later this year, will be done. Under the Navy's plan, cleanup of the wetlands will be done last even though tests have confirmed that the toxic plume already has reached the bay.

And studies have found that contamination from at least one of the sites, including the cancer-causing solvent trichloroethylene, or TCE, has already entered the deep aquifer that supplies up to one-third of the public water supply for Mountain View, according to the coalition's grant application. City officials maintain the water supply is safe from industrial contamination.

If the grant is awarded, the coalition will seek bids from environmental consultants to evaluate technical documents, supply information for regular newsletters and community meetings, and represent the coalition in discussions between the EPA and the parties responsible for the cleanup.

Smith said the coalition already is working with groups in neighborhoods in Mountain View and Sunnyvale that are concerned about the toxic threat.

In 1989, the coalition was the first community group in the

state to receive a technical assistance grant from the EPA, and has monitored cleanup at the IBM site in South San Jose.

### IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

The Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition is located at 760 North First St., San Jose, Calif. 95112. The telephone number is (408) 287-6707.

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