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## EDITORIALS

# Cleaning up clean rooms

### Semiconductor industry must protect women workers

**A**T last, undeniable proof: Workers exposed to toxic chemicals in semiconductor plants have an increased risk of miscarriage. As far back as December 1986, reports suggested that women who worked in chip manufacturing suffered fertility problems. Nearly three years later the semiconductor industry commissioned a major study of 15,000 chip workers to see whether they experienced similar problems.

Finally, last week, the results were released. Yes, there is something to worry about in the clean rooms: 40 percent more miscarriages. While the news is disturbing, it doesn't warrant immediately shutting down manufacturing plants. It does warrant swift action by the industry to reduce exposure to glycol ethers and other toxics, and to perfect technologies that use safer chemicals.

Some of this work already has begun. In some plants, women concerned about their reproductive health are al-

lowed to transfer to jobs where they aren't exposed. While this is not an ideal solution for workers or employers, it is a necessary stopgap.

The industry also has made some progress toward replacing glycol ethers with other, presumably safer, chemicals. But most plants still use them.

The Semiconductor Industry Association's response to the study results was on the mark: First, speed up efforts to eliminate glycol ethers by getting companies to share information on new manufacturing methods. In an industry that guards technological advances like secret treasure, this could be a remarkable effort.

The association also urged companies to continue to reduce exposure to chemicals where possible. An SLA task force is expected to make further recommendations early next year.

So far, so good. Now, how aggressively will individual companies pursue these efforts? Because of the SLA study, everyone will be watching.