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Day care, industry vie for cheap rents

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Churches and day care centers are combing industrial areas of Santa Clara County for space at low rents, triggering a clash with nearby manufacturers and property owners who say kids and toxic chemicals don't mix.

Although much of the urban South Bay is built out, years of recession have left industrial parks with lots of vacant space at low prices — making them increasingly attractive.

The clash that has resulted is sparking debate in cities including Sunnyvale, Santa Clara, Mountain View and Cupertino.

"There was no other available property we could afford. We

picked a site that fits the needs for our church," said Dennis Low, a pastor of the Home of Christ Church, which last month won Cupertino City Council approval to move in to an industrial park. "Other churches have located in light industrial areas, and it doesn't seem to be a problem."

But the proximity of churches and day care centers could mean higher costs in complying with environmental laws and lower property values because the new neighbors could hinder the ability of nearby companies to change manufacturing operations or expand, some companies and industrial property owners say.

"I think the cities are shooting themselves in the foot on a long-

The proximity of churches and day care centers could make operations more difficult for industry, opponents say.

term basis by destroying the integrity of industrial neighborhoods," said longtime industrial developer John Sobrato Sr., who argued against approval for the Cupertino church move and is taking part in a lawsuit to block a planned mosque, school and day care center in Santa Clara. "We don't need to give companies any more reason to move to Austin,

Portland, Seattle, Phoenix and other emerging high-tech clusters."

Among the hot debates:

■ A plan by the Muslim Community Association to move a mosque, school and day care center into a Santa Clara industrial zone was approved by a split city council, but then halted by a lawsuit from industrial firms and

property owners who say the city failed to perform adequate environmental studies.

The city's fire chief had recommended against approval, saying children might not be safe in a toxic spill, but the Muslim Community Association argued that dangerous spills are rare, and it plans to build safeguards into the site. A hearing is scheduled today in Santa Clara County Superior Court, although a decision is not expected for weeks.

■ The Home of Christ Church's application has been approved in Cupertino over the objections of property owners in the industrial park, although it still requires a final vote by the city council on Feb. 8. Although fire officials

said hazardous materials on surrounding properties don't pose an undue risk, church officials voluntarily agreed to drop plans for a child care facility on the site.

■ After an application for a child care center last year, Mountain View adopted an interim ordinance prohibiting for two years the placement of child care facilities, rest homes and other sensitive populations in industrial areas or within 1,000 feet of a hazardous materials user while city officials study potential risks and impacts on adjacent businesses.

■ Sunnyvale is studying whether child care centers should be allowed in districts where haz-

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No day care centers as neighbors, industry says

■ **CLASH**
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ardous materials are stored, with a report due March 1. A draft report recommends allowing such facilities in industrial areas subject to conditions.

In San Jose, about a dozen child

care centers and churches have been allowed in industrial areas under a conditional use permit. The arrangement has triggered no friction so far, say city officials and representatives of industry.

Santa Clara County Manufacturing Group, a consortium of industries, earlier this month set up a meeting among representatives

of companies, cities and regional regulatory agencies to discuss the issue.

"When you start mixing zoning, you're putting together what could be perceived as incompatible uses, which then creates a problem," said Elizabeth Keicher, the group's director of environmental programs.