

BUSINESS

MARKETS ♦ HIGH TECH ♦ ECONOMY

TALKING BUSINESS

“The giant sucking sound you hear is Hollywood talent moving up to Silicon Valley to work on (3DO) projects.”

TRIP HAWKINS,
3DO chairman

EPA seeks to double toxics list

By REBECCA SMITH

Mercury News Staff Writer

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said Thursday it wants to double to 633 the dangerous chemicals on its Toxics Release Inventory list, a move applauded by environmental groups because it will give communities more data on chemical exposure levels produced by industrial sites.

In 1991, manufacturers released into the air, water and ground more than 3.38 billion pounds of about 320 toxic chemicals on the list. Under the proposal, 313 chemicals would be added to the disclosure list, including such potentially lethal substances as nitric oxide and malathion.

The EPA expects the near-doubling of the list to generate 20,000 additional reports from 7,000 manufacturing facilities nationwide, including about 2,400 industrial facilities that have not been required previously to report the release of dangerous chemicals. Manufacturers will have an opportunity to comment on the proposal before implementation.

In California, the expansion would have the greatest impact on chemical companies that manufacture or formulate pesticides because 170 of the chemicals proposed for the list serve that purpose.

The list expansion would have little impact on the electronics industry because many of the chemicals used in semiconductor and electronics manufacturing — such as solvents — are on the list.

California has more chemical manufacturing plants than any other state — about 1,425, representing more than 10 percent of the nation's total. In terms of chemical production, the state ranks seventh, following No. 1 Texas, New Jersey, Louisiana, Illinois, Ohio and North Carolina, according to the Chemical Manufacturers Association.

Environmental activists have been pushing for a broader toxics inventory list since it was created in 1986. Simultaneously, manufacturers have pressured the EPA to have about 50 chemicals delisted.

“This expansion of the list is definitely a step in the right direction,” said Paul Orum, coordinator in Washington of the Working Group on the Community Right to Know, a not-for-profit organization that presses for fuller environmental disclosure.

Ted Smith, director of the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, said communities must know exposure levels to pressure industrial sites to cut emissions. “We’ve wanted a broader list for years because the old list minimized the problem with toxics,” he said.

Industrial sites are required to report emission levels to the state and the EPA if they use more than 10,000 pounds of a named toxic substance in a manufacturing process or they manufacture more than 25,000 pounds of the chemical.

“This definitely puts the spotlight on facilities and recognizes peoples’ right to know what’s being released in their communities.”