

Area firms cut back pollution

■ As manufacturers reduce toxic emissions, making gains gets harder, study says.

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Silicon Valley's largest manufacturers have gone from producing almost 75 percent of reported pollution in the county to 22 percent from 1987 to 1993, according to a study released Tuesday by the Santa Clara County Manufacturers Group.

Each year, making improvements gets tougher as obvious sources of air and water pollution emitted from manufacturing facilities are eliminated, said the manufacturing group's president, Gary Burke. In the latest year, from 1992 to 1993, the companies reduced pollution by 14 percent, a lower percentage decline than in prior years.

Gordon Moore, chairman of Intel Corp., praised the report's findings as an example of industry's commitment to "environmental excellence." But, according to an activist group, the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, scaled-down production in the valley and government regulation also played an important role.

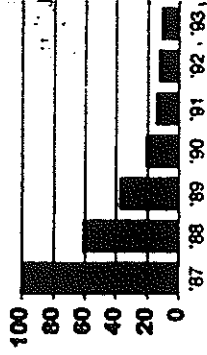
The manufacturing group began compiling reports of its members' annual pollution after the Environmental Protection Agency began requiring companies to report releases of certain chemicals in 1986. Each year, pollution has decreased — at higher rates than either the nation or state.

In early years, companies reduced pollution largely by recycling metals and other waste, said Elizabeth Keicher, the group's environmental programs director. In 1990, new federal regulations advised companies to try to eliminate pollution at the source. Since then, local companies have focused on replacing the most toxic chemicals in their production processes and on using smaller amounts of polluting chemicals.

But while such programs are clearly help, some companies are pol-

LOCAL COMPANIES REDUCE POLLUTION

The 22 companies in the Santa Clara County Manufacturing Group's annual survey reduced emissions at twice the rate as polluters in the nation as a whole. % emissions (base year 1987)



Source: Santa Clara County Manufacturers Group
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luting less simply because they aren't making products in the county anymore. Since 1987, the county has lost 9 percent of its electronics jobs.

Firms included in the report that have eliminated or substantially reduced Santa Clara County manufacturing include National Semiconductor Corp., FMC Corp. United Technologies Corp., General Electric Co. and Westinghouse Corp.

And while some companies have reduced emissions locally, they've increased them as they expand elsewhere.

Intel, for example, has a permit to release up to 20 tons of air emissions in Santa Clara County and up to 356 tons of emissions in Rio Rancho, N.M., said Leslie Byster of the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition. (But Byster also praised Intel for taking the lead in switching from a dangerous gas to the chemical's liquid form, which is easier to control).

When companies remodel or rebuild a site, they also often face air quality requirements to put in new state-of-the-art emission control equipment.

Silicon Valley companies made their most dramatic improvements over the six years by reducing releases of ozone-depleting Freon, which can not legally be produced in the United States after 1995. Those reductions accounted for one-third of the companies' improvements in the period.

For instance, Hewlett-Packard Co. used Freon and the dangerous chemical Trichloroethane to clean and dry components that had to

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be free of even microscopic specks of dust. The company cut Freon use in half by changing the liquid in degreasing tanks frequently. It also discovered that a detergent similar to dish washing soap could clean components. This new system should be in use by September.

While 21 other companies saw declines in emissions, Advanced Micro Devices Inc. nearly doubled the amount of polluting chemicals it released, the report said.

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