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Barbara Grady

19:16 19 Nov Intel<INTC.O> EPA agreement draws green group fire

WASHINGTON, Nov 19 (Reuters) - The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency signed an agreement Tuesday with Intel Corp giving the company greater flexibility to manage the emissions from a new semiconductor plant in Chandler, Arizona.

Under the plan, which is part of EPA's Project XL, designed to cut regulatory red tape, Intel committed to cap pollution at 10 tons annually for hazardous air pollutants and at 50 tons annually for other key pollutants.

Despite local public support for the five-year plan, some green groups feared that by setting an overall ceiling on the plant's emissions instead of setting standards for each source at the plant, EPA was allowing Intel to emit more of some pollutants as long as it curbed emissions of other pollutants.

"For some of these compounds we think their previous permit is more stringent than what Project XL has given them," Chris Van Loben Sels of the Natural Resources Defense Council said. "There are backstops to try and prevent Intel from switching from less toxic to more toxic chemicals under the permit limits, but those backstops are not very stringent," Van Loben Sels said.

In a telephone news conference held by EPA and Intel from Arizona, EPA Administrator Carol Browner disputed the idea that the plant might eventually pump more dangerous pollutants into the air, land or water than it would have under standard rules.

"I don't think anyone in this room agrees with that," Browner said, referring to local community members, Intel and environmental officials who were in Chandler with her for the signing of the agreement.

Browner said the plan would allow the public to monitor and protest new emissions.

Jim Lemmon, representing the Arizona Public Health Association, said environmental and community groups had been in on every step of the negotiations. "I know that whatever happens, there will not be a danger to public health or workers at the facility," he said in the teleconference.

The agreement, which was first announced Monday, gives Intel a single permit for the whole plant, including its main manufacturing room which will eventually span eight acres.

It exempts Intel from having to update its permit every time it makes a small change in its manufacturing processes, and allows the company to file a single air, land, and water pollution report to Maricopa County, instead of filing separate reports to several agencies.

The company agreed to adopt a five-year plan to use new pollution prevention techniques and increase waste recycling.

Intel's Chief Operating Officer, Craig Barrett, said the agreement would save the company a lot of time, which typically goes into paperwork.

But he said the company's motive in devoting a year to reaching the agreement for the \$4 billion plant was not to save a lot of money but to improve community relations.

"We're doing America a favor," Barrett told reporters.

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