
GLOBAL ELECTRONICS INFORMATION NEWSLETTER

July, 1982

Issue No. 23

CHEMICAL REGULATIONS

Following the discovery, earlier this year, of numerous chemical leaks at Silicon Valley electronics plants (see Issue No. 19), the Santa Clara County Fire Chiefs' Association initiated a task force to develop rules to prevent future mishaps. Although the State of California has been tightening controls on hazardous wastes, the chemicals oozing into the Silicon Valley environment have largely been production supplies, not covered by any legislation.

Major electronics firms, stung by the enormous expense of cleaning up toxic spills, and worried about the liabilities associated with leaks, decided to cooperate. Five trade associations (the American Electronics Association, the Peninsula Industrial Business Association, the Electronics Association of California, the Semiconductor Industry Association, and the Santa Clara County Manufacturers' Group) combined their forces to create the Industrial Environment Coordinating Committee. Industry representatives worked closely with the task force on its numerous subcommittees.

The task force is developing a model ordinance, which it hopes will be adopted by Silicon Valley's City Councils. Given the nature of the effort, it is likely that the ordinance, if found acceptable in environmentally conscious Silicon Valley, will be copied in other parts of California and perhaps across the country.

A draft of the model ordinance, made available to the public in July, demonstrates a comprehensive approach to the problem of hazardous industrial materials. It establishes strict requirements for double-walled storage containers in new construction, and it provides for the regular monitoring of older containers which do not meet the new standards. Companies are responsible for the costs of cleaning up any unauthorized chemical discharge. Each firm is required to insure against chemical accidents.

On July 23, the task force held its first and perhaps only public hearing. Although there was little publicity, the Sunnyvale City Council

chambers overflowed with observers. Most of those attending appeared to be from industry, but most of those speaking represented public interest groups such as Citizens for a Better Environment, the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers, and the Santa Clara Center for Occupational Safety and Health.

Public speakers generally endorsed the ordinance, but they attacked its provisions designed to "protect trade secrets." Certain records compiled under the ordinance would not be available to the press or the public, eliminating one of the best mechanisms of enforcement - exposure. Should those provisions remain, it is likely that environmental and labor groups will organize to push for change when City Councils consider the measure.

Of course, it will take more than words on paper to ensure safe chemical use in the electronics industry. Though some companies appear to be willing to spend substantial resources to prevent accidents, many are not. Thus, cities will have to dedicate their own resources to both enforcement and clean-up. The cities of Sunnyvale and Santa Clara appear to have the most comprehensive programs underway. Sunnyvale, reports the **Peninsula Times-Tribune** (June 30, 1982), has budgeted \$300,000 for a toxic-chemical team in its Public Safety department.