
GLOBAL ELECTRONICS INFORMATION NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 44

US ISSN 0739-0416

July, 1984

POISONED WATER

This June Silicon Valley water and public health officials discovered that those residents in the North Bayshore section of Mountain View who have been taking their domestic water supply from private wells have been drinking and washing in water laced with extremely high concentrations of trichloroethylene. The likely source is a what appears to be a five-year old leak from an underground storage tank operated by nearby Teledyne Semiconductor. The company discovered and reported the leak to authorities in 1982, as part of a regional monitoring program, and its consultant warned in a 1983 report that private wells might become contaminated.

At about the same time, it was disclosed that an underground pool of TCE threatened the public water supply in nearby Sunnyvale. Public underground water supplies and storage basins in most of Silicon Valley - excluding the South San Jose area where Fairchild and IBM chemicals have poisoned several wells - have thus far been unaffected by the rash of leaks and spills from the electronics and gasoline industries.

However, officials and residents are worried that underground chemicals might penetrate the layer of clay separating the polluted near-surface aquifer - which supplies private wells like those in Mountain View - and contaminate

the deep aquifer exploited by public agencies. Silicon Valley contains thousands of abandoned agricultural wells which might channel the pollutants downward.

In Sunnyvale, the Regional Water Quality Control Board ordered Signetics, Advanced Micro Devices, and TRW to commence clean-up operations. Thus far, the companies, all of which have reported leaky tanks, appear to have carried out monitoring programs designed to limit their own liability for clean-up.

Area residents had been lulled into complacency by high-tech industry's apparent concern about groundwater contamination. Industry had cooperated in developing the prevention-oriented model ordinance for hazardous material handling and storage, now law in most of Santa Clara County. And high-tech firms, led by Fairchild and IBM, claim to have spent over \$70 million thus far on testing and clean-up.

The recent disclosures prompted widespread public reaction. The Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition began circulating petitions and a series of well attended public meetings. Ted Smith, head of the Coalition, has suggested that the entire underground water supply in Silicon Valley be declared a Federal Superfund site.