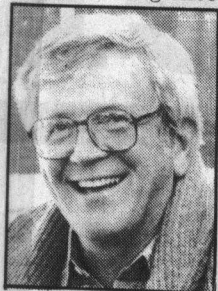


Tanner gets pollution reprieve

By DENISE FRANKLIN

Sentinel staff writer

MONTEREY — Salz Leathers Inc., in violation of federal and regional air pollution regulations since January, was given a temporary reprieve Wednesday from meeting those rules.



Lezin

The Santa Cruz-based business now has until Jan. 1 to reduce the chemicals used in its leather tanning process.

The reprieve, or variance, from the regulations was granted by the hearing board of the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District.

Norman Lezin, chairman and principle owner of Salz, said he was embarrassed about the violations and said his company almost certainly could meet the regulations by October.

"We are fixated, if that is the word, in getting it resolved," Lezin said.

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— Norman Lezin, Salz chairman

At issue is the amounts of what the board called "volatile organic compounds" in the solvents used to treat the hides. These compounds evaporate, mixing with nitrogen oxides in the air and reacting with sunlight to form smog.

Under a rule imposed by the air district and required by the federal Environmental Protection Agency, Salz was to reduce the use of these compounds by a certain amount as of last Jan. 1.

The company failed to do so and asked for a variance to give it more time.

When the violations came to light, Ed Kendig, enforcement division manager for the air district, said the leather processor could face penalties; however,

no penalties have been assessed.

Approximately 36 percent of the solvents used by Salz were in compliance with the regulations as of Jan. 1 and now approximately 80 percent comply, said Ward Alksne, Salz's environmental manager.

"We have made significant progress," he said.

Lezin blamed the problem on a change in employees that left the company with no one knowledgeable about how to reduce the volatile organic compounds in solvents.

He said it is no simple task, since these solvents are what create the type of leather Salz's customers demand.

To ensure that the company makes continual progress toward complying with the regulations, the hearing board required random sampling of solvents. These samples will be analyzed by the air district to determine how much volatile organic compounds they contain.

This random sampling will continue through next July 4, according to the conditions of the variance.