

County delays ban on chemicals

By Lee Quarnstrom
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After hearing several pleas that they delay the start of a strict ordinance banning chemicals that help deplete the ozone layer, Santa Cruz County supervisors Tuesday agreed to put off their proposed law for six months.

The ordinance, which would ban the sale or use of most products using ozone-depleting compounds, was to go into effect on Jan. 1. But supervisors agreed to postpone it until July 1 with the understanding that another six-month delay might be in order to help local businesses come to grips with its effects.

Similar regulations have been adopted in Irvine, Berkeley and the South Coast Air Basin.

The ordinance would ban the use of the ozone-depleting compounds in such products as building insulation or as coolants in refrigeration or air conditioning units in homes or automobiles. It would require firms that service or repair such products to prevent allowing the compounds into

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the atmosphere.

Requests that the Jan. 1 deadline be postponed for a year came from various speakers — most representing local business.

Two speakers noted that farmers, who depend on ozone-depleting compounds for

several uses, need a year to come up with alternatives to the chemicals.

Dave Moeller, county agricultural commissioner, noted that some chemicals used to sterilize the soil — a necessary procedure for the production of strawberries and some other crops — may fall under the proposed ban.

Bob Dwyer, executive director of the Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce, said that farmers depend on cold-storage facilities that probably use the compounds. He asked the board for a delay to allow the agricultural community to evaluate the ordinance and to seek alternatives.

An eloquent plea for a delay came from a spokesman for Lockheed Missiles & Space Co. — which has apparently dealt with its own problems with the dangerous chemicals.

Asking supervisors to authorize a task force of government, business and academic leaders to study the proposal, Lockheed executive Larry B. Gilliam said his firm had been working on eliminating the

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ozone-depleting compounds for the past year. But, he said, smaller businesses still need more time to understand the effects of the ordinance on their operations.

Lockheed has worked to eliminate the use of the compounds in 60 different processes at its Santa Cruz Mountain facility north of Bonny Doon, said Gilliam, manager of production and test engineering at that site.

He said the materials had been used in painting, cleaning and testing at the Lockheed facility. Different painting methods have been developed, he said; isopropyl alcohol has replaced ozone-depleting compounds as a cleaning agent; hot, soapy water has replaced the chemicals for degreasing. And a new device that separates ambient air into very hot and very cold air seems a likely alternative to the use of coolants to chill circuit boards — a necessary step in testing the high-tech items.

He asked not only for a one-year delay in the ordinance and formation of the task force, but also for the addition to the law of a “feasible technology” exemption. This, he said, would exempt businesses from meeting the prohibition of ozone-depleting compounds if no

feasible alternatives exist.

Also urging the delay was Steve Bogner, a heating and air conditioning contractor, who said many small businesses such as his own would suffer unless given time to come up with alternatives.

“Our industry is aware of the problems,” he said. “We’re working to phase them out. But the manufacturers are slow to move, and you’re not going to force manufacturers on the national level to change their equipment overnight.”

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Board members unanimously approved the motion by Gary Patton to delay the restrictive parts of the ordinance until July 1, 1992 — with the possibility of extending implementation for six months.

The motion included establishment of a task force to meet with businesses and state and federal agencies. This group will help businesses meet their concerns and to see if there is any overlap between the county ordinance and state and federal regulations aimed at phasing out ozone-depleting compounds.

The task force will also see if the four cities in the county want to join in a unified effort to ban the chemicals.