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Salz Leathers

Nader targets Salz; *Hazardous materials* owner Lezin furious

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SANTA CRUZ — A Ralph Nader report targeting Salz Leathers company as a danger spot for employees is an example of "McCarthyism of the left," Salz President Norman Lezin said Thursday.

A group headed by Ralph Nader Wednesday released a list of 249 industrial sites, including Salz Leathers, where the

group claims government studies show a link between exposure to hazardous substances and increased risk of cancer and other health problems.

The consumer lobby — called Public Citizen Health Research Group — claimed the Reagan administration is withholding the names of 250,000 workers who face an increased risk of getting cancer in order to protect their employers from lawsuits.

Lezin said his first reaction to the report is "to call my lawyer and sue them."

The report "is a media event hyped by Nader and sensationalized by everyone else who has to make an 11 o'clock news deadline," added Lezin.

In connection with his business, Lezin said the report is untrue and "can only malign us and frighten our workers."

According to the Associated Press, the group's director, Dr. Sidney M. Wolfe, told reporters at a news conference, "What the (Reagan) administration is telling us is that they're much more interested in protecting the economic interests of companies...than they are in protecting American workers."

Shirley Barth, a spokeswoman for the federal Department of Health and Human Services, said the administration is reluctant to immediately undertake a massive notification program for fear of spreading unnecessary alarm among employees exposed to cancer-causing chemicals in the workplace.

Nader's group listed Salz Leathers as a site where federal officials found workers faced an increased risk of cancer.

Lezin says this is not true.

Nader report

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National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health found no detectable levels of the toxic leather dye benzidine, even when concentration levels were increased merely to exaggerate the results of the study.

Comparatively little benzidine was used at the tannery, said Lezin. It is a black dye. He said he discontinued use after the study — even though it was a cheaper dye — just to be on the safe side.

But, the studies found "absolutely" no links to cancer at Salz Leathers, said Lezin.

Also, he said he had voluntarily discontinued the using the dye, replacing it with a more expensive one. "It is still being used in other tanneries everywhere," added Lezin.

Nader and Wolfe filed a request under the Freedom of Information Act and at their news conference released a list naming the 249 facilities where the 250,000 workers were employed.

The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health obtained the names of the 250,000 workers by performing medical studies of employee records starting in 1972. Mortality rates of workers were

compared and employers were notified when the rates were found to be unusually high.

According to the figures from NIOSH used to compile Nader's list of employers, notification would be of direct medical benefit to more than 110,000 of the workers at 86 work sites because the diseases they could contract are treatable.

"There is some suggestion in all of this that we are keeping the names secret," said Donald Berreth, a spokesman for the CDC in Atlanta. "That is not correct."

Berreth acknowledged that while NIOSH, which is part of CDC, did not notify workers individually, "we notified the companies of the results (of the studies) and notified the unions of the results where there were unions representing the workers. News conferences were held locally on the completion of some of the studies and the conclusions of many studies were published."

Nader and Wolfe, however, said that many of the workers have moved and never received word that they faced increased risk of cancer and related diseases.