

Local firms ranked high as polluters

Improvements since survey, legality cited

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SANTA CRUZ — Three factories in Santa Cruz County rank in the top 20 percent of air polluters nationwide, according to the Environmental Defense Fund.

But the plants are within legal limits and are working to reduce their emissions, company officials say.

The defense fund study, based on reports filed by companies in 1995, ranks Silicon Systems on Delaware Avenue in Santa Cruz in the top ranks for total toxic materials released into the air.

Salz Leather on River Street in Santa Cruz was in the top 20 percent nationally for a variety of carcinogens and toxic chemicals. And West Coast Circuits on West Beach Street in Watsonville made the top 20 percent for non-cancerous pollutants.

"We think that there are some cost-effective things that can be done to reduce waste which are often not being done," said Environmental Defense Fund spokesman Kevin Mills.

Pointing out financial benefits in reducing emissions and water-waste is a primary goal of the fund, according to Mills.

"The first question is what these chemicals are being used for, and whether these chemicals are truly necessary," he said.

Salz Leather, a major polluter through the late 1980s and early 1990s, has significantly reduced pollution, said Environmental Manager Ward Alksne.

The company has switched to water-based coatings instead of highly toxic solvents used previously, he said. But Salz still ranks in the top 20 percent for air emissions of suspected cardiovascular, developmental, reproductive, kidney and liver toxicants, the defense fund said.

The company continues to make progress in reducing emissions, Alksne said.

"Our emissions have significantly reduced since 1995, we've made some good



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Salz Leather on River Street was in the top 20 percent nationally for a variety of chemicals, but within legal limits.

changes," Alksne said. "We've been almost 100 percent in compliance."

Fred Thoits, engineering development manager of the Monterey Bay Air Quality Board, said Salz has gone beyond what is expected in meeting air quality standards.

"They have done a commendable job," Thoits said.

While it has substantially improved its standards since the early 1990s, Salz recently violated water contamination limits for chemicals not included in the survey.

"They have been in violation of the lim-

its on dissolved sulfide," said Bob Barrett, Waste Water Laboratory and pre-treatment manager for the city. "We are working with them to see that they make this last transition. We see sulfide compliance as very important."

West Coast Circuit's Environmental Health and Safety Supervisor John McCann said he did not have enough information to respond to Sentinel inquiries. Silicon Systems did not dispute the EDF report.

"Our emissions production is just about

the same and in general is probably similar in type to that of our competitors," said Roger Riddemoser, manager of environmental health and safety for the company.

Barrett said that Silicon Systems has also had problems meeting Santa Cruz's wastewater standard. "It has had a few system failures that resulted in minor pH fluctuation, but they have upgraded their equipment and added holding tanks which allow the waste to be discharged in a more controlled way."