



The new method meets pollution requirements.

Salz tannery cuts pollutants, production costs

By DENISE FRANKLIN
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — When you slip on your Dr. Martens, you can now feel comfortable that the leather finishing that went into them is more environmentally sound.

Salz Leathers Inc. of Santa Cruz, which provides fine leather to such high-end clients as Dr. Martens shoes, is now complying with air pollution requirements that it had failed to meet in the recent past, according to the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District.

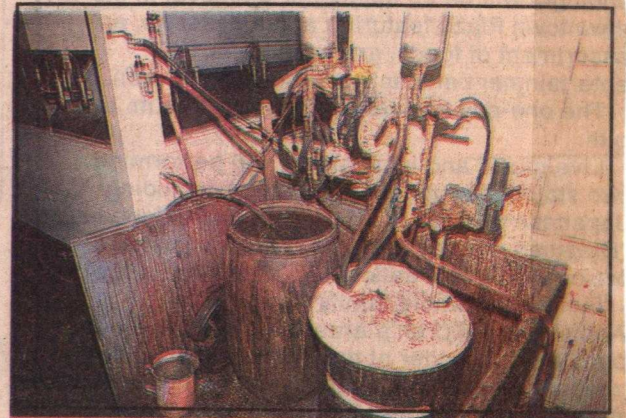
All coatings Salz uses to finish leather now meet regional and federal air-quality requirements, said Ward Alksne, Salz environmental manager. His contention has been backed up by the air pollution district.

The coatings are regulated because they contain chemical compounds that evaporate into the atmosphere, mixing with nitrogen oxides and sunlight to form smog.

Norman Lezin, chairman and principle owner of the leather processor on the banks of the San Lorenzo River, said he was embarrassed in July by reports that some coatings didn't meet rules imposed by the air district to comply with federal regulations.

Lezin said he is not only relieved the problem has been solved, but grateful that air district rules actually saved material and labor costs. He is so grateful that he has invited Air Pollution Control Officer Doug Quetin to the company barbecue Wednesday to receive a plaque.

Please see SALZ — BACK PAGE



Dan Coyro/Sentinel photos

The old method leaked fumes into the air.

Salz

Continued from Page A1

"Because of the rule the district adopted, Salz ended up with a better product," Quetin said. "As I understand it, the customer is more satisfied with it, and it is produced at a better cost. So it turned out to be really good for Salz and reduced smog emissions by half or more."

Quetin heads the very entity that three months ago was saying Salz was in violation "big time" and probably would face "substantial" penalties.

Salz still could face penalties, said Ed Kendig, enforcement division manager for the air district. But if a company goes above and beyond what it is required to do, penalties can be offset by the additional efforts, he said.

Kendig said that while Salz's coatings are still being analyzed because of a glitch in the analysis, the air district is comfortable that the leather processor is meeting requirements.

Jeremy Lezin, Norm Lezin's son and president of Salz, the largest leather processing plant west of the Mississippi, blamed the problem on key employees, including the former technical director, who were unable to reduce the volatile organic

compounds and subsequently left.

Salz immediately sought a reprieve from the air pollution control board last summer, and received an extension until Jan. 1 to meet the requirements.

The requirements were met by August because of the expertise of Chin Min Lim, hired in May as technical director, environmental manager Alksne said.

"Salz responded to the air district demands like a frog on a hot griddle," he said.

Under Lim's direction, Salz has reduced its use of volatile organic compounds by 20 percent, Alksne said. In the past five years, it reduced the use by 50-60 percent. And in the near future, it expects to almost eliminate their use.

That all translates into less pollution.

But it's a tricky process, since the compounds allow the dyes and oils to penetrate deep into the leather, Alksne said.

Salz needed to find ways to reduce the compounds but retain the quality of leather its clients demand.

It has managed to do this in several ways. For example, it is gradually eliminating sprayers that spray coatings onto the leather and release a lot of the excess into the atmosphere. They are being replaced with rollers that roll the coatings into the leather.