

Salz seeks break on pollution

By DENISE FRANKLIN

Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Salz Leathers Inc. admits it is in violation of a regional air pollution rule, citing technical problems and managerial changes as the cause.

Salz has requested a variance giving it until August 1996 to comply with the rule. An air district board will consider the request July 5.

Jeremy Lezin, president of the largest leather processing plant west of the Mississippi, promised Salz is doing everything it can to quickly comply.

However, Ed Kendig, enforcement division manager with the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District, said the leather processor is in violation "big time" and probably will face "substantial" penalties from the air district.

Salz is violating a rule concerning the amount of volatile organic compounds in the solvents it uses to process leather. All of these compounds evaporate into the air, where they mix with nitrogen oxides and sunlight to form ozone.

In spring 1994, Salz worked closely with the air district to come up with a standard to gradually reduce the amount of volatile organic compounds over the next 1½ years. The rule only applies to Salz.

But when it made its most recent quarterly report to the air district, it was obvious Salz wasn't meeting the standard.

"About 90 percent of their coatings were not in compliance," said Kendig. "They are in violation big time. That is why they have requested a variance that allows them to continue to operate in violation while they pursue a remedy."

"The rationale they gave (for the violation) was incredible, that there is new management and it is not the same management as when the rule was developed," Kendig said.

But Lezin said that change in management was why the pollution rule couldn't be met.

"We had a series of setbacks technically. We had a plant manager leave in August. He was in charge of the finishing formulas. We then hired a finisher in January who brought nothing to the party to solve this problem.

"We finally hired a new plant manager in April who is directing his full attention to this. His strength is in the finishing of leather."

And Lezin further said that despite the violations, Salz is actually making progress in cleaning up the air.

"We have not been able to meet those standards, it

Please see SALZ — BACK PAGE

Salz

Continued from Page A1

is true, but if you look at the total amount of (volatile organic compounds) emitted over the last five years, there has been a steady decline. And if you look at the amount of VOCs emitted per thousand square feet of leather produced, it has also declined," he said.

Kendig said that the amount of the compounds emitted by Salz is not regulated by the rule, only the amount of these compounds in the solvents. Federal rules, he said, apply to the amount of pollutants released into the air.

Federal regulations simply state that if Salz emits more than 250 tons a year, it must install the best available technology to reduce pollutants. Such equipment would cost millions, Kendig said.

Salz is well below 250 tons and, therefore, only needs to install the most reasonably available technology, he added.

Since requesting the variance, Salz has made prog-

ress, Lezin said. It has already removed solvent from one of its operations.

Because it's showing an effort to resolve the problem, the company has been granted an interim variance until July's hearing.

And if at that hearing the company shows it is making progress, the law states the hearing board must grant a variance, according to Alan Holbert, hearing board chairman and director of computing resources at Cabrillo College.

"The law is written to try to get the board and the violator to work together to solve the problem," Holbert said. "If no progress is made or there is not adequate progress over a period of time, then you would have a problem."

A public hearing on Salz's request for a variance is set before the hearing board at 4 p.m. July 5 at the air district offices, 24580 Silver Cloud Court, Monterey. For more information, call 647-9411.