

Toxic Brew

Hynix leads TRTK reporting with a river of acid.

Industry in Eugene outputs nearly 18 million pounds of toxic chemicals a year, according to the city's Toxics Right to Know (TRTK) database. That's about 120 pounds of lethal chemicals for every man, woman and child in the city.

Forty-one companies reported their use of 750 different chemicals in 2003, the latest year data was available. About half of the chemicals were shipped away in products or as waste. About 10 percent were released to the environment through the air, surface water, on-site disposal or sewer.

Hynix output the most chemicals, 6 million pounds, accounting for about a third of the total toxic output in Eugene. Forrest Paint ranked second with 5.3 million pounds. The Willamette Valley Company was third with 1.6 million pounds.

A.M. Todd lead in releases to the environment, with three quarters of a million pounds

Forrest Paint outputs large quantities of toxic solvents including toluene (1 million pounds), acetone (900,000 pounds) and xylene (641,000 pounds). Most of the chemicals were shipped in products or as waste. But Forrest Paint released 10,000 pounds of toluene to the environment, 11,000 pounds of acetone and 6,000 pounds of xylene. Forrest Paint has won praise from environmentalists for installing cutting edge filters to reduce its air emissions. In the past five years, the company has cut its toxic air releases in half to about 49,000 pounds in 2003.

The Willamette Valley Company uses it's 1.6 million pounds of toxic chemicals to make chemical products for wood treatment and coatings in west Eugene. Most of the chemicals are isocyanates, which can severely irritate the respiratory tract. Almost all the chemicals end up shipped in products, the company reported.

Hynix's 600 tons a year of sulfuric acid would fill about 1,700 bathtubs with the burning chemical.

of toxics released. Other leading environmental releasers included Lanz Cabinet (143,000 pounds), Weyerhaeuser (143,000 pounds) and Hynix (132,000 pounds).

Hynix was given \$60 million in tax breaks for its west Eugene chip plant. The corporation uses a river of dangerous industrial acids and solvents in its chip making process. It output 1.2 million pounds of sulfuric acid, 655,000 pounds of isopropyl alcohol, 522,000 of a propylene glycol compound, and 299,000 of an acetate compound. In the past five years, Hynix's toxic output has increased 7 percent.

Most of Hynix's toxic chemicals ended up shipped from the factory as waste or in products, the company reported. But the corporation released a total of 132,000 pounds of toxic chemicals to the environment, including: 83,000 pounds of nitrates, 17,000 pounds of isopropyl alcohol and 12,000 pounds of ammonia.

Hynix also leads in the use of the most hazardous chemicals — those that are highly hazardous or extremely persistent bioaccumulative toxins. Hynix uses more than half of the citywide total of these highly dangerous chemicals. For example, Hynix's 600 tons a year of sulfuric acid would fill about 1,700 bathtubs with the burning chemical. Hynix also used a total of about 400,000 pounds of corrosive hydrochloric, hydrofluoric and nitric acids.

A.M. Todd owns East Earth Herb in west Eugene which output 887,000 pounds of toxic chemicals, mostly ethanol and alcohol used to make herbal extracts. The company flushed most of the chemicals to the local sewage treatment plant.

Voters overwhelmingly passed Eugene's Toxics Right to Know charter amendment in 1996. Citizens gathered signatures and put the measure on the ballot after Hynix (then Hyundai) refused to provide an accounting of what dangerous chemicals it was bringing to town.

Hynix, the local Chamber of Commerce and their business allies have been fighting the popular law in the City Council, state Legislature and state courts ever since. Opponents didn't defeat the toxics law, but they did succeed in reducing fees for big chemical users like Hynix at the expense of small chemical users. Fees for Hynix have dropped 90 percent, while small companies have had to pay twice as much.

To reduce the burden on smaller manufacturers, the City Council considered a proposal to broaden the program to include dry cleaners, gas stations and other chemically intensive businesses. But the council withdrew the proposal earlier this year in the face of strong business opposition. The city imposed the higher fees for smaller companies and is now lobbying to remove or raise the fee cap in the Legislature. **EW**



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