

Acidic Air

Hynix wants to emit tons more

Hydrofluoric acid is nasty stuff. It melts glass, can penetrate concrete and is listed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as a possible agent for use in chemical terrorism. Hynix used 103 tons of hydrofluoric acid in 2005 in its west Eugene chip plant to etch silicon wafers, according to the Eugene Toxics-Right-to-Know database.

Hydrogen fluoride (HF) is a pollutant that is a byproduct of hydrofluoric acid use. The debate continues over Hynix's permit request to increase its emissions of HF into the air from 1.8 to 5 tons a year. Even at low levels, HF can irritate the skin, eyes and respiratory tract. A strong concentration of HF on a small patch of skin can penetrate deeply through tissues and cause decalcification of bones and fatal damage to the heart.

The concentration that would be released by Hynix, even at the increased rate of 5 tons per year, is 4.1 micrograms per cubic meter of air. That is well below the 14 micrograms per cubic meter said to pose "significant risk" to humans with chronic exposure, according to the Lane Regional Air Protection Agency (LRAPA). To establish the level of risk, LRAPA consulted the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, the only source for health standards for chronic exposure to HF. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has not established

an estimate of the effects of continuous inhalation of HF over a lifetime.

Hynix contends the increase in the release of HF is due in part to its efforts to reduce the greenhouse gases implicated in global warming. These perfluorocompounds (PFCs) remain in the atmosphere for up to 50,000 years. But the permit states the increase in release of HF is also due to an increase in production.

In an effort to allow the public as much input as possible on the permit request, LRAPA has extended the public comment period, which now ends March 31.



UO chemistry professor Paul Engelking pointed out that these areas that will be affected are 'high quality natural resources' and the HF could potentially irrevocably damage three endangered species of wildflowers.

David Monk, president of Oregon Toxics Alliance and a member of the LRAPA board, wants to know: If the HF increase has benefits, why has Hynix not tried to explain its case to the public more clearly? "It is incumbent upon any business owner," he argues, "to show what's in it for the community."

LRAPA has already received more than 100 public comments on the permit, many from residents of neighborhoods close to

Hynix. The letters and emails express fears of the effects of HF on children and on those with conditions ranging from breast cancer to autism. And the cause of fatal pulmonary fibrosis in three men living within two miles Hynix has never been determined (see *EW* 5/4/06 and 12/14/06).

In addition to the possible effects upon the plant's human neighbors, Monk and UO chemistry professor Paul Engelking are concerned with the effects of HF on plant life. The nearby Ridgeline Trail, West Eugene Wetlands and the Nature Conservancy's Willow Creek Preserve could all be affected by HF after its release into the air, they said.

Engelking said HF can combine with clouds and precipitation, enter the environment as acid rain and enter waterways.

be affected are "high quality natural resources," and the HF could potentially irrevocably damage three endangered species of wildflowers found only in the Willamette Valley: Bradshaw's lomatium, the Willamette daisy and Kincaid's lupine. Kincaid's lupine is the main food source for Fender's blue butterfly, also an endangered species, which is primarily found in the Willow Creek Preserve.

Doug Erwin, LRAPA's permit writer, said he is taking Engelking's concerns into account. He stressed that, "Hynix really wants to cooperate and will do what it takes." Hynix spokesperson Bobby Lee, asked if Hynix plans to add mechanisms for reducing the amount of HF released by the plant, deferred to the LRAPA report.

Engelking's Instrumental Analysis class recently took water samples from the 18th Ave. ditch in the vicinity of the Hynix plant and discovered that surface water fluoride levels are already elevated.

According to Engelking, LRAPA did not make an adequate attempt to quantify the effects on vegetation, and plants are far more sensitive to the effects of HF than humans are. He pointed out that these areas that will

The public may give written comments by mail at LRAPA, 1010 Main St., Springfield 97477 or via email at lrpa@lrpa.org. The draft permit, as well as LRAPA's review report, are available online at www.lrpa.org/permitting/draft_permits/ and at the reference desk of the Eugene Public Library or at the LRAPA office. LRAPA will make a decision on the permit within 45 days of the end of the comment period. **EW**

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