



WILL HYNIX CLEAN UP ITS TOXICS?

Hynix is shutting down, and Eugene may be left cleaning up a variety of messes left behind. Former employees are scrambling for jobs during an economic downturn, the politicians are counting the loss of tax dollars and environmentalists are starting to wonder who is going to clean up Hynix's toxics and who's going to pay for it.

Semiconductor plants like Hynix make up many of the Superfund sites on the National Priority List in California's Silicon Valley. Superfund sites are uncontrolled or abandoned areas with hazardous waste that could affect nearby ecosystems or people. The Silicon Valley contamination was so bad that there were stories of residents who had toxic chemicals coming out of their water taps, says UO chemistry professor Paul Engelking.

At the end of 2007, Hynix reported to the Eugene Toxics Right-to-Know database that it had 258,174 lbs of toxic chemicals stored on site. The company used more than 9 million pounds of toxics in 2007 alone to produce its chips.

So how does Eugene head off becoming another statistic on the Superfund list? Ted Yackulic of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 10, which oversees Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Alaska, says the chemical cleanup process in Oregon for a plant like Hynix is largely voluntary. "The company is in the driver's seat," he says.

Engelking, who has questioned Hynix's toxic releases and their affects on nearby natural resources in the past, says that he thinks "Hynix will be able to cart off most, if not all, of their hazardous materials." The Superfund sites in Silicon Valley were the result of leaking underground storage tanks, says Engelking, and "it is unlikely that any of Hynix's tanks have leaked, and most of them are aboveground."

If Hynix's toxics do need cleanup, the process begins after the plant officially gives notification of a permanent shutdown. Thirty days before permanent closure, Hynix needs to submit a "facility closure plan" to the fire marshal's office explaining how they will get rid of the chemicals.

The EPA only steps in if there is a concern that there are chemicals left on the site that would be harmful to people or the environment. According to Yackulic, even when a site becomes a Superfund site, "the polluter pays" to have the cleanup done. A site must be cleaned up whether it is going to be reused as another facility or left abandoned, according to EPA regulations. Still, the money must be found to pay for an EPA investigator, and not everyone believes Hynix will voluntarily report all of its toxics.

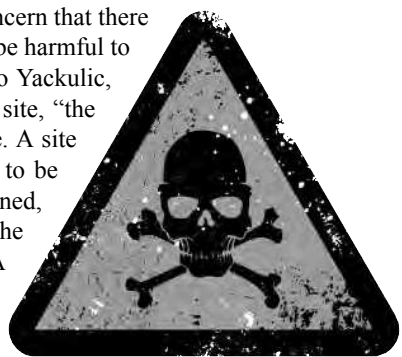
Engelking notes that there is "likely to be some residue deposited in the area, especially at the Nature Conservancy downwind, from 10 years of inorganic salts, such as ammonium and sodium nitrates, sulfates and fluorides, emitted into the air."

He is also concerned with a stormwater drain emptying into a ditch north of 18th Avenue, adjacent to the plant. The ditch drains away from the area near the plant and empties into Willow Creek. The water in that ditch has "has very high conductivity due to inorganic salts, principally sulfates," says Engelking. He says conductivity measurements have run into the thousands of microSiemens per centimeter compared a river like the McKenzie, which measures about 10.

Willow Creek empties into the Eugene wetlands and then into Amazon Creek.

Though sulfates are generally considered to be nontoxic by the EPA, they are considered a drinking water contaminant, and consuming high doses of sulfate laden water can lead to dehydration in animals or humans drinking from the stream. Sulfates in the environment are also a contributing cause to acid rain.

— Camilla Mortensen



THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



news Briefs

LONG WAIT FOR NEW COP AUDITOR

The Eugene City Council plans to take as long as nine months to hire a new police oversight auditor, leaving the key police oversight function understaffed and delaying the selection until after an election in which an anti-police auditor mayor and majority could take power.

The City Council voted 6-1 Aug. 11 for a hiring timeline that would delay finding a new auditor until next May, about nine months after the current auditor Cristina Beamud announced she would leave Aug. 22 to take a similar position in Atlanta.

The vote delays the selection of an auditor until after the November election and January swearing in of a new mayor. Earlier votes have shown the City Council balanced 4-4 in its support for an independent auditor.

Mayor Kitty Piercy has broken ties in support of the function. But Piercy is in a tight re-election race with former Mayor Jim Torrey. Torrey, a former Republican turned Independent, has said he opposes the independent auditor and would like the function controlled by the unelected city manager. One of Torrey's largest campaign contributors is the Eugene police union, which opposes the independent auditor.

"I know there are people who feel that because of the turnover in council they want to slow it down or speed it up," Councilor Bonny Bettman said. "I doubt that however it works out, I'd be here for the hiring."

Bettman said she's more concerned about the understaffing at the auditor's office until a replacement is hired. The auditor's office employs three people: an auditor, a deputy auditor and an office assistant. After Aug. 22, the staff will reduce from three to two positions.

"This timeline is longer than it needs to be," said Councilor Betty Taylor. She said that hiring a recruiter would delay the process. The council plans to spend almost two months selecting and working with the recruiter before it first posts the position as vacant in October.

The slow hiring process stands in contrast to a hiring process for city manager a decade ago while Torrey was mayor. Amid criticism that conservatives were rushing the decision before a less conservative council could take office, Torrey and the council majority hired Jim Johnson in five months without a recruitment process. — Alan Pittman

CPA WEIGHS IN ON EXCLUSION

The amended exclusion ordinance that passed the Eugene City Council Monday night violates basic civil liberties, accord-

WAR DEAD

Since the U.S. invasion of Iraq began on March 20, 2003

(last week's numbers in parentheses):

- 4,138 U.S. troops killed* (4,130)
- 30,490 U.S. troops injured* (30,464)
- 145 U.S. military suicides* (145)
- 314 coalition troops killed** (314)
- 1,123 U.S. contractors killed (accurate updates NA)
- 94,487 to 1.1 million civilians killed*** (94,327)
- \$544.5 billion cost of war (\$542.5 billion)
- \$154.8 million cost to Eugene taxpayers (\$154.3 million)

* through August 11, 2008; source: icasualties.org; some figures only updated monthly ** estimate; source: icasualties.org *** highest estimate; source: iraqbodycount.org; based on confirmed media reports; other groups calculate civilian deaths as high as 655,000 to 1.1 million.