

life and a chance to attend college. Babcock won the competition Wednesday night at Tanoan Country Club. It was the first for deaf students sponsored by the Heights Optimists Club. Babcock advances to next level of the contest in El Paso, where he'll vie for \$1,500 in scholarship money.

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Chemicals haunt water at W. Side plant

State officials say the toxic substances could seep into future city drinking-water supplies.

By Tony Davis
TRIBUNE REPORTER

Twelve years of little progress in cleaning up groundwater pollution underneath an old West Side electronics plant has left state and local officials impatient and worried.

Since 1984, officials have known that toxic levels of solvents and the heavy metal chromium lie underneath a Sparton Technologies Inc. plant near Coors Road and Irving Boulevard Northwest.

But continuing negotiations and several studies of the problem have stalled a cleanup, officials say. Now, they're worried the underground contamination will taint future city water supplies.

"It's a big deal, a very serious problem," said Steve Cary, deputy direc-

tor of the state Natural Resource Trustee's Office.

The contamination "absolutely" could be as serious as the groundwater pollution at the San Jose Superfund site south of Albuquerque, Cary said.

At stake is what officials call a "plume" of pollution spreading west from the site. It lies 100 feet below the groundwater table and is 3,000 feet wide by 1,000 feet long, said Bill Williams, a State Environment Department spokesman.

At the heart of the plume, concentrations of trichloroethylene, a suspected cancer-causing solvent, reach 700,000 parts per billion, said Bill Turner, the state's natural resource trustee. The federal standard is 5 parts per billion.

The nearest drinking-water well lies 2.6 miles west of the site. Its owner is New Mexico Utilities, a private water company that serves the Paradise Hills-Rio Rancho area northwest of Albuquerque.

One state environmental agency



Shari Blurto/TRIBUNE

has told Sparton it must get going and start a cleanup soon. Another agency plans to start pushing for the Legislature to spend money for a cleanup. Then, the state would bill Sparton.

"We're not going out there finger pointing. We want to go out and clean the site up and make them pay," said Turner, who has the authority to determine how much contamination has damaged a site. "This company has been playing games with the EPA for 12 years."

Jan Appel, a spokesman at Sparton's corporate office in Jackson,

Mich., didn't return a call from The Tribune. Officials at the company's Rio Rancho plant had no comment.

The company manufactured printed circuit boards and other electronic equipment parts from 1961 until it shut down the plant in 1994, according to an Environmental Protection Agency fact sheet. The EPA couldn't be reached.

The company has been slowly pumping out and treating contaminated groundwater for some time, but, "We believe it is inadequate," said Williams.

In a meeting with Sparton and the trustee's office two weeks ago, Environment Department Secretary Mark Weidler "gave a very forceful message that things have gone on too long, they are the responsible party, and they must clean it up," Williams said.

Sparton's law firm says the contamination poses a minimal threat, according to a memo from Jeffrey Peterson, a Bernalillo County's Environmental Health Department geologist.

Clinton urges actions to

The Associated Press

BELFAST, Northern Ireland — Hailing Northern Ireland's month-long truce as a historic step toward global tranquility, President Clinton today challenged the war-weary British province "lock in the gains or peace."

In a speech to workers at a textile machinery plant, Clinton said a true resolution to a quarter-century of conflict between Protestants and Roman Catholics is certain to be sailed by "people who, down inside, will never be a give up the past."

He urged them not to succumb to those pressures.

"Just as peace has its price,

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