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BURRELLE'S

Prop. 65 succeeded in reducing toxins, study's author says

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FRESNO — Proposition 65, the anti-toxins initiative approved by California voters in 1986, has been a failure, right?

Not so, says an environmental planner who has determined that statewide emissions of dozens of toxic chemicals have dropped sharply since the initiative's passage.

"It would be hard to make a case that it was a waste," said William Pease, who published his study in the December issue of Environment magazine.

Pease said that manufacturers and other chemical users have stopped using many toxic chemicals in favor of less hazardous substitutes and have reduced their use of many others.

To date, 505 chemicals have been listed under Proposition 65 as potential causes of cancer or birth defects. Pease said emissions have decreased for two-thirds of all chemicals in that group for which data is available.

"There has been a move away from using Proposition 65-listed chemicals," he said. "A smart company at this point realizes that continued use of carcinogens or reproductive toxins is going to be a constant source of liability in the future."

State officials agree

Pease's conclusions are echoed by state officials implementing Proposition 65 — and by Jack Gri-

santi, a Kingsburg consultant who audits businesses for environmental compliance.

"There has been a substantial reduction in toxic chemicals across the board in industry," Grisanti said.

Steve Book, interim director of the Office of Environmental Health Hazards Assessment in the California Environmental Protection Agency, which administers Proposition 65, cited two reasons businesses have reduced their toxic chemical use in reaction to the initiative.

First, he said, companies may choose to stop using chemicals so that they won't have to issue public warnings of their dangers, as the initiative requires.

Second, Book said, companies may stop using chemicals because of fears that they will be sued if they expose people to them or contaminate water with them.

Threat of enforcement

In other instances, compliance with Proposition 65 has been less quiet — provoked instead by state enforcement or the explicit threat of it.

Book said several consumer products are now made with different materials because of state action taken under the initiative.

Solvents used in typewriter correction fluid were changed, for example, and the use of lead in foil caps on wine bottles was banned, he said.