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County leads area in hazardous spills

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There are estimated to be two spills of hazardous materials every day in the Bay Area, and more of them occur in Contra Costa County than anywhere else in the nine-county region, according to statistics for 1980.

Local officials concerned with the problems the spills create met Saturday in Berkeley at an assembly sponsored by the Association of Bay Area Governments.

Some of the other statistics that emerged at the meeting were:

In 1980, 50 percent of the spills occurred from trucks on roads and highways, 68 percent of the recorded spills were on land, 62 percent of the spills involved petroleum products, 72 percent of the spills occurred during working hours and the highest number of local spills occurred in Contra Costa and Alameda counties.

One outcome of the study was a recommendation for centralization of spill information. There is still no

program for centralizing information, but speakers at the meeting provided evidence that the problem is being attacked from many sides.

Contra Costa Supervisor Nancy Fahden, who heads the ABAG Hazardous Spills Task Force, noted that the Bay Area is one of six locations nationwide setting up demonstration projects. One of the other locations is the Love Canal, an area in New York that gained national attention following the discovery of underground toxic materials there.

ABAG's final plan should be completed in February.

Assemblyman Tom Bates, D-Berkeley/El Cerrito, said a fatal accident in the Caldecott Tunnel on April 7, in which a gasoline tanker exploded, triggered his awareness of the major problem of transporting hazardous materials in the Bay Area.

He said many state bills have been proposed to deal with the problem but none are comprehensive.

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SPILLS

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Bates also warned local officials that they should be alert to what is going on at higher government levels.

"Nobody is going to want a toxic landfill in their county," he said. So, the state and federal governments are coming along to solve the problem and to say where the dumps will go.

One of the major problems facing Bay Area communities is the cost of cleaning up hazardous spills.

Cleaning up an average spill costs about \$20,000, according to ABAG official Eugene Leong. But, he said, the price of a major spill cleanup can be enormous.

For example, earth removal and ground cleanup alone following a PCB spill on Interstate 580 near San Ramon last year cost \$400,000.

And he noted that cleanup companies like the IT Corp. of Martinez can "clean up literally and figuratively" since there is no competitive bidding for the job. Leong said ABAG is exploring a plan of insurance for a pool of local governments in an attempt to deal with the cost problem.

Santa Clara Fire Chief Don Visconti proudly discussed his city's successful hazardous chemical program begun two years ago. At that time every business was surveyed and a list made of on-site chemicals. The bu-

sinesses pay a fee for a permit to store the chemicals. The fees go into a special fund for the program which includes two full-time Fire Department chemists.

Ken York, of Chemical Waste Management Inc., pointed out that money is not the only problem in hazardous spills oversight.

"Every department wants its own team, it's an ego problem," he said.

But a trained region response team is the economical and effective way to handle spills, York said. As an example of the area such a team could cover, he conjectured that Santa Clara County might be well served by two teams of experts.