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ANTHRAX

THE NEW MEXICO CONNECTION

COVER STORY

ANTHRAX

THE NEW MEXICO CONNECTION

by Bill Hutchison

Clint Archuleta owned a small farm and ranch in southern New Mexico. He had about a dozen head of cattle at any given time, mostly for milk and meat for his family. Or at least, he used to. Nineteen years ago, before Archuleta retired and sold his land, something happened on his ranch that would change his life forever.

On an unusually warm May night in 1982, Archuleta and his family sat down to one of his wife's delicious home-cooked meals. "We had roast that night," Archuleta said. "Raised it myself." After dinner, Archuleta and his young son Dennis washed the dishes. Exhausted from a hard day at work on the farm, the family decided to turn in early. After Dennis climbed into his pajamas, Archuleta and his wife kissed the boy good night and went to bed. Half and hour later, Archuleta was abruptly awakened by his son shrieking frantically for his father.

"I ran into Denny's room," Archuleta said. "A whole mess of things were running through my mind in the 30 seconds it took me to get up and get down the hall." He burst into the boy's room, alarmed by the plaintive tone in his cry. Tears were streaming down Dennis' face. "I asked him what was wrong," Archuleta remembered. "He said there was a monster just outside. I was relieved. I was afraid something really had been wrong." Archuleta held his son for a moment, reassuring him that monsters didn't exist.

That's when he heard it. "I couldn't figure out what the noise was. Something unearthly, and a kind of garbled moan." Archuleta looked out the window, saw nothing but the evening silhouettes of a few of his cattle. He realized it was one of the animals making the noise that had frightened his son. He threw on his clothes, turned on the corral light and ran outside.

"It was disgusting. At first, I thought she'd been attacked by coyotes or something. One of my milk cows was bleeding from everywhere." Archuleta was stunned at the sight. Black blood leaked from the cow's ears, nose, mouth and rectum. "I about passed out," admitted Archuleta, a burly giant, even in his 70s, and not a man who could be easily shaken. "I looked at her eyes and as she stared back at me, she opened her mouth like she was gonna moo." A big bubble of blood formed on the cow's lips, and the horrible gurgling cry came from deep in the animal's throat.

Archuleta ran inside and called the veterinarian, knowing this was way out of his realm of expertise. A couple of hours later, Archuleta stood in front of the cow as the veterinarian readied a shot to put the beast down. He told the vet he'd rather not pay a man to kill his own cow. The vet turned to Archuleta and shook his head. He apologized to the rancher and said one word.

Archuleta immediately understood.

"Anthrax."

The cow had likely been infected by spores that had lain dormant in the soil for years. To avoid the risk of further contamination, the remainder of the herd had to be put down as well. "We burned all those bodies," Archuleta said, remembering the plume of smoke that blew off the massive funeral pyre. "Then we buried 'em in quicklime. It was a sad, sad day." Archuleta looked down. "We'd been talking about retiring for a while. Seemed like we didn't have much choice after that." The monster that Archuleta had assured his son was only figment of his imagination was real, but turned out to be far too small to ever see coming.

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In the last few months, the world has become hyperaware of one of its oldest diseases. But it's no longer limited to one man's farm or a handful of cattle — now postal workers, government officials and ordinary citizens have all been affected by the disease. Some have died. And while most of the cases have occurred on the East Coast, New Mexicans who feel distanced from the disease should think again — anthrax is closer than you think. Consider the recent controversy surrounding Los Alamos National Labs' (LANL) handling of its all-but-secret anthrax research and shipments.

Santa Fe physician Matt Kelly has had a front-row seat for a number of epidemics over the course of his decades-long career — from an outbreak of the swine flu in 1976 to 1993's hantavirus scare throughout the Southwest. "To assume that the United States government does not have a biological weapons program," Kelly said, "would be completely wrong. We should be looking in our own backyard, at the labs."

While lab officials originally denied that any such program existed, much less was housed in New Mexico, official LANL press statements over the years have slowly started to unravel. In the mid-'90s, when a biosafety level three lab — which would allow the labs to work with virulent anthrax — was proposed for LANL, the National Nuclear Safety Administration made its justification short and sweet. "There is currently no available facility nearby in which living infectious agents may be studied safely," read their press statement. "In order to preserve the safety of the United States and to protect the country from weapons of biological warfare, such a facility should be created. The existing infrastructure and security at Los Alamos National Labs make it a prime candidate."

Researchers work on anthrax DNA sequencing at LANL: "To assume that the United States government does not have a biological weapons program would be completely wrong. We should be looking in our own backyard, at the labs." photo by John Bass/LANL

> "Virulent samples of the live bacteria were shipped by mistake to LANL. Lab officials didn't admit the error for more than a month."

Lab officials further justified the need for the facility by saying that existing LANL laboratories were currently unable to deal with live samples of deadly bacteria. At a time when the cost of sending the deadly bacteria to someone is a mere 34¢, a safe biological facility began to look very tempting.

Then a research scientist at Northern Arizona University shipped — by mistake — virulent samples of the live bacteria to LANL in late October. It came to light through the efforts of perennial LANL watchdogs, the Los Alamos Study Group (LASG), but lab officials didn't admit the error for more than a month, and only after LASG blanketed other watchdog groups with details of the transgression.

But the incident did also show that the Lab could, in fact, safely handle bacteriological agents. While it provided comfort for some, many were confused about the need for a new level three biosafety lab when it already had a level two lab. LANL has said it needs the added capacity for a stepped-up research program.

In any case, the shipping slip-up has since made its way into the national spotlight. Massachusetts Rep. Edward Markey has launched his own preliminary investigation into how virulent anthrax could have been shipped to the labs, seemingly in direct violation of federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) policies. Markey sent letters to the Department of Energy and Department of Health and Human Services, investigating whether the university or the labs broke the law. At the same time, LANL is considering revoking its long-standing policy against working with virulent anthrax, even before the biosafety level three lab is completed.

The history of anthrax goes back much further than the present-day terrorist crisis with which LANL has been asked to lend a hand. Margaret Clemens, a professor and bacteriologist at the University of Illinois, says it's as old as creation. "Many of us who work in the field believe anthrax to have been one of the deadly plagues mentioned in the Bible — it's tenacious, can hibernate for decades and kills indiscriminately. If God wanted to make a perfect killer, he did a good job."

THE HISTORY OF A 'PERFECT KILLER'

Every American who watches the evening network news now knows that there are two types of infection from the bacteria. Cutaneous anthrax affects the

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skin, causing deep sores with a black center. The black center — resembling anthracite coal — gave anthrax its name. But inhalation anthrax, the exponentially more lethal of the two, wasn't "discovered" until the mid–1800s. In 1837, in the British textile industry, wool sorters who dealt with goat hair began to rapidly die off. Over the next decade, what came to be known as "woolsorter's disease" spread rapidly. It drew the attention of the British medical community. Over the course of the next 30 years, British doctors compiled a database and discovered a link between the virulence of the disease and imported goat hair. Toward the end of the 1870s, a doctor named J.H. Bell devoted himself to puzzling out this mysterious ailment. He managed to identify the organisms in the blood of infected workers, and recommended manufacturers wash all imported hair before allowing workers to sort it.

A coroner's jury, after investigating one death, offered even stricter advice. Steep it in salt water, they said, and wash it twice in very hot water. Incidents of woolsorter's disease decreased in the intervening years. By the turn of the 20th century, an Anthrax Investigation Board was founded to make further study of the problem and offer additional solutions. Frederick Eurich, a prominent bacteriologist, was named to head the organization, and over the course of the next two decades, analyzed more than 200,000 blood samples and 14,000 goat hair samples. He discovered that blood–contaminated fibers were most often associated with the disease, and tested hundreds of methods for disinfecting the hair. Eventually, he found that a combination of alkaline solution and formaldehyde was the most effective way of destroying the anthrax spores. After 1939, thanks in large part to Eurich, no further cases were reported among textile workers.

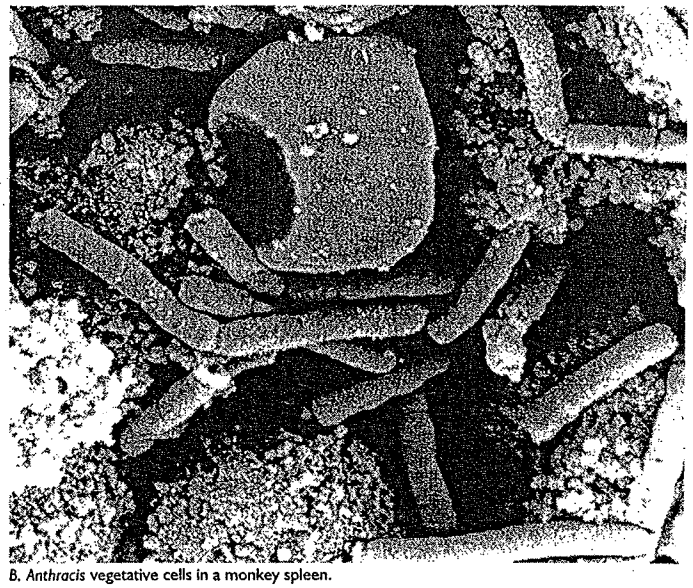
Anthrax had a much quieter presence in the United States. Between 1900 and 1980, only 18 cases of inhalation anthrax in humans were reported in this country. (No solid data exists on the number of cases in livestock, but anecdotally, it was much higher than in humans.) That hasn't stopped study of the bacteria. In fact, as more discoveries are made about the nature of the organism — as well as how effectively it kills — many researchers are becoming more and more enamored with anthrax. "It's a beautiful bacteria," said Sam Weber. Now retired, Weber worked for almost a decade at the CDC in Atlanta, Ga. "Anthrax was born to kill."

Although the CDC has not released a comprehensive report in almost two decades, Weber estimates that there has likely been at least one case of inhalation anthrax every other year since 1980. As a perfect killer, it was inevitable that someone would eventually try to make it into the perfect weapon. In 1988, a CIA report revealed that Iraq had been heavily involved in producing mass quantities of anthrax, as well as other deadly biological agents.

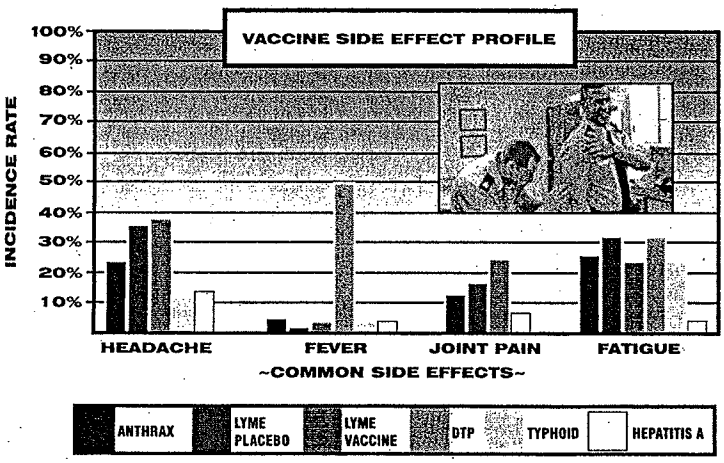
Without any reliable technology to detect or prevent massive casualties from a biological attack, LANL immediately stepped up to the plate. Lab scientists began work on a plan that would allow U.S. military forces to detect germ attacks before they were able to inflict much damage. The technology was mediocre and consistently ineffective in test runs. The project consisted of lasers built into massive cargo planes that would constantly sweep a suspicious area. The lasers — in theory — would watch for an aerosol cloud, the most likely method of deployment for biological weapons. Because the technology was so unreliable, the LANL plan was never implemented.

It would be 13 years before the irony of LANL's detection efforts were revealed and Markey could launch his inquiry. But the use of the bacteria as a weapon is hardly a refined procedure. The bacteria "clumps" when in quantity, making dispersal a difficult task at best. In order for it to be used as a weapon, it has to be mixed with an anti-caking agent, much like what is used in common powdered laundry detergents, or better yet, aerosolized — an expensive and incredibly dangerous procedure.

"Ten thousand spores are more than enough to infect someone," said Weber. "And they quadruple in an infected patient every half hour or so." As the toxins spread, Weber's hypothetical patient would begin to cough and sweat. Breathing would become labored and would be accompanied by intense pains in the chest and high fevers. Tremors would begin



B. Anthracis vegetative cells in a monkey spleen.



NOTE: ANTHRAX RATES DERIVED FROM COMBINED EXPERIENCE OF TAMC-600 SURVEY AND USAMRIID REDUCED DOSE STUDY

Source: Anthrax Vaccine Immunization Program (AVIP), Falls Church, VA

> **"Thanks to experimentation, more than 80 varieties of anthrax now exist. Most have come from universities and military research facilities."**

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Pundits have long bandied about th

idea that even the most homicidal of terrorists are frightened of using biowarfare because of the unreliability of the weapons. These microscopic troops follow no commander once released, and a simple gust of wind is enough to undo months of careful planning.

Thanks to experimentation on the bacteria, more than 80 varieties of anthrax now exist. Most have come from universities and military research facilities, although Clemens guesses that foreign laboratories have fashioned several new strains that have yet to be classified — or even discovered — by U.S. scientists.

But the dozens of anthrax strains still have no reliable cure. Creating a viable vaccine is far from certain. A human anthrax vaccine has existed for 50 years, but vaccines against bacteriological agents are unreliable. "That's part of what makes anthrax so attractive to terrorists," said Kelly. "There are two ways to try and protect someone. One is before they're infected. Like a rubella vaccine, you inject the patient with the bacterium, which, in theory, stimulates the immune system to protect the host from infection."

Cutaneous anthrax lesion on the neck of an infected man.
photo courtesy of CDC

Military medical data shows that existing anthrax vaccines fail in at least 10 percent of cases in ideal medical environments. On the battlefield or in a city, where such facilities are not immediately at the ready, the percentage of failure begins to grow. In a city the size of Taos, with a population of around 5,000, a widespread infection would still result in a row of more than 500 coffins.

The second way to protect a patient is by injecting them with a toxoid, a byproduct of the bacterium. "That's more like a tetanus shot," said Kelly. "You're not trying to prevent infection at that point. What you're trying to do is protect the patient from the harmful or deadly effects of the toxin."

It isn't anthrax itself that kills someone — it's the toxins that are produced as the bacteria begin to react with the body. "The purpose of the toxoid in a tetanus shot is to keep the toxin from giving you lockjaw — but you're still infected."

With the dozens of varieties of anthrax in the world, each with its own degree of virulence, one single vaccine has no guarantee of widespread effectiveness. "I've always had a healthy respect of anthrax," said Clemens. "And even fear. But now, with people actively using it as a weapon, I've gone beyond fear. I'm terrified. We've turned one monster into many, and refined it beyond its original form."

Kelly adds that the secrecy at LANL and the strategic meting out of information to the public, especially at a time like this, is unacceptable. "Secrecy is patently anti-science," he said. "Scientists should not be huddled in biosafety labs keeping their data from each other." Weber adds, "This bacteria is out in the world right now, killing people. We have deadly strains, and no real way to protect soldiers or citizens from it.

"Modern medicine can save a lot of people, but it can't work miracles, especially if we don't have the information we need to try and fashion an effective vaccine. Whoever is mailing letters with this stuff in it isn't going to wait until we decide to work together." Sharing data, Kelly says, is the only way science can work to reduce the dangers anthrax presents. Having research facilities of every stripe, from private foundations to universities to federal labs like LANL and the CDC, all working in tandem without proprietary boundaries will allow speedier advances. "The way you work something out in science is to present an idea and have other scientists beat the hell out of it with tests," Kelly said. "The more scientists that can see your idea, the more testing gets done, and done quicker. If we're in danger from terrorists, we better share information, so everyone in the field can hammer out some solutions that really work. LANL and everyone else needs to be open with what they discover. We may not have all the time we think we do." *CW*

Ben Hutchison is a Santa Fe–based writer.

ENVIRONMENT

Groups object to Area G

◆ *Los Alamos Study Group leads protest against LANL waste storage site* 1/15/02

Monitor Staff Report

A group of New Mexico organizations plans to deliver a letter Wednesday morning to New Mexico Environment Department Secretary Pete Maggiore, requesting him to close Los Alamos National Laboratory's Area G, a news release said.

Area G, in Technical Area 54, historically has been used for hazardous wastes, including chemicals and radioactive material.

The environmental organizations, including the Los Alamos Study Group, have urged closure of the site. Their most recent effort involved delivering "letter-cans" to Gov. Gary Johnson. The letters were delivered on cans of food designed to look like small waste drums. The cans of food subsequently were delivered to the Food Depot to provide food for poor people.

According the information provided by the study group, the New Mexico Attorney General's office requested closure of this site on July 12, 2001, with no response from environment officials. NMED opened a public comment period Dec. 21 on the most recent version of the cleanup plan for Area G. The documents for comment are available at the Hazardous Waste Bureau web site. More information is available at www.lasg.org.

The 27 environmental organizations sending the letter are concerned that hazardous materials from the waste disposal site are infiltrating the ground water and being distributed through wind erosion.

They state that no serious closure plan has ever been submitted for Area G and that no public hearings have ever been held on the future of the site. The letter being delivered to Maggiore describes Area G as "a sort of unpermitted 'WIPP site."

LASG states that LANL began the application process for permitting its existing and planned hazardous waste disposal sites on Mesita del Buey 21years ago. The permitting process was never completed, the study group says, although interim status was granted and continued for five years, even though the EPA and NMED implemented enforcement actions during this time.

LASG states that Area G should have been closed years ago based on environmental regulations and lack of a permit. A closure plan would, by law, include protections for citizens and the environment, including commitments to long-term monitoring, financial assurance, and creation of an accurate waste inventory. Closure options range from long-term containment in place to removal of some or all of the waste.

DOE Web Sites Criticized

Groups Ask For More Content

BY JENNIFER MCKEE
Journal Staff Writer

> *"The DOE needs to go over information it takes down (from the Web). Taking it down wholesale is brainless."*
>
> GREG MELLO, LOS ALAMOS STUDY GROUP LEADER

The government watchdog group that first urged the Department of Energy to take sensitive information off agency Web sites now says the DOE yanked public information wholesale off the Internet, using security as an excuse to keep the public in the dark.

The Project on Government Oversight sent a letter Monday to Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham saying his department pulled information off the Web "apparently with little discretion."

"An informed, engaged populace is a necessity in a functioning democratic society and access to government information is paramount to this aim," the letter reads.

The Energy Department did not respond to requests for comment.

Los Alamos National Laboratory was one of the DOE facilities that pulled information from its Web site at the direction of its National Nuclear Security Administration overseer. The NNSA is the semiautonomous arm of the DOE responsible for the nation's nuclear weapons labs.

Ironically, the DOE began taking information off the Web in October after the Project on Government Oversight sent Abraham an earlier letter saying detailed information about the location and amount of nuclear materials at DOE sites was available on DOE Web sites. Such information could be valuable to would-be terrorists, the group wrote.

But according to its latest letter, the DOE didn't just remove select information useful to terrorists, it removed volumes of environmental and pollution data of little use to wrongdoers, but necessary for an informed citizenry.

The agency has yet to review such information and repost the documents.

Project on Government Oversight Executive Director Danielle Brian asked Abraham to put appropriate information back on the Web.

She is not the first. Shortly after the DOE scoured its Web sites last fall, a conglomeration of 34 nuclear activist groups sent a letter to Abraham asking him to restore the Web sites.

Some local groups have taken to posting LANL information on their own Web sites.

Nuclear Watch of New Mexico, a Santa Fe lab watchdog organization, posted Los Alamos lab's Resource Conservation and Recovery Act dumping permit on its Web site. It also posted a list of all DOE web sites that have been taken down altogether since October.

The Los Alamos Study Group also has posted a series of maps on its Web site showing the locations and sources of environmental pollution at Los Alamos lab. The maps used to be available on the lab's Web site, said Greg Mello, head of the Study Group, but were taken down this fall.

"The DOE needs to go over information it takes down (from the Web)," Mello said. "Taking it down wholesale is brainless."

Groups Want LANL's Nuke Dump Closed

1/16/02

By Jennifer McKee
Journal Staff Writer

Los Alamos National Laboratory has been operating an illegal hazardous waste dump for 20 years, and the New Mexico Environment Department has let the lab get away with it, according to a cadre of New Mexico environmental groups.

Some 27 lab watchdog, environmental and political groups delivered a letter to state Environment Department Secretary Pete Maggiore Tuesday morning, asking Maggiore to close the lab's existing nuclear waste dump, a facility that also holds almost 30 years worth of non-nuclear hazardous waste.

Greg Lewis, director of the Environment Department's Water and Waste Management Division, said the department generally agrees with the groups' account of the dump and is looking at options for dealing with the landfill.

"They've made credible arguments," Lewis said. "We're giving them our full consideration and are in the throes of addressing it."

He said the department expects to release several documents this spring dealing with the laboratory's hazardous waste dumping permit and a plan for cleaning up the lab.

Los Alamos lab representatives did not return phone calls seeking comment.

The environmental groups' letter contends that the site known as "Area G," where Los Alamos lab now disposes of nuclear waste, has been in violation of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act since 1985. Area G opened as the lab's centralized nuclear and hazardous waste dump in 1957. Back then, there were no laws covering the disposal of hazardous waste and no laws specifying that very radioactive waste must be stored in a special repository, as there are now.

According to the letter, the laboratory dumped a wide variety of wastes in the shallow pits and deep shafts at Area G, including what would now be categorized as hazardous waste, like solvents or dangerous chemicals. The lab also dumped what is now considered transuranic waste and

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must currently be disposed at the Waste Isolation Pilot Project. Transuranic waste refers to any waste containing metals heavier than uranium. Some such wastes can appear relatively mundane, like metal tools used to manipulate plutonium that became contaminated as a result.

Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group, who principally authored the letter, said that in 1980 the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, or RCRA, went into affect. That law said that any hazardous waste dumps had to be licensed and any such dump that closed had to be cleaned up or capped to keep the waste from escaping.

Nuclear waste is managed under a different law and is enforced by the federal government, not state environment departments.

Because Los Alamos had been disposing of chemical waste at Area G, Mello said, the lab applied for a hazardous waste permit in 1980.

The lab acquired an "interim status" to run such a dump and Los Alamos began operating an official, permitted dump, pending the state's formal issuance of a permit, Mello said.

In 1984, more stringent rules came into effect, and the laboratory decided to "get out of the hazardous waste business," Mello said. At that point, the lab still had not received a permanent permit. It withdrew its hazardous waste permit application in 1985 and began shipping such waste elsewhere.

But the lab had, between 1980 and 1985, operated a hazardous waste dump under RCRA. When such a dump closes, according to that law, it must either be cleaned up or stabilized, Mello said. In the lab's case, neither happened.

Mello and the other groups now say that the state Environment Department had an obligation to force the lab to clean up or close Area G in 1985.

Mello wants more than just the hazardous waste cleaned up at Area G; he said NMED must force Los Alamos lab to clean up all of Area G and close it, as the laboratory included all of the site in its original hazardous waste application.

But the area is now, and has been since 1957, the lab's only disposal area for transuranic waste.

That situation, along with the fact that states have no jurisdiction over nuclear waste, including the nuclear waste dumped at Area G, has complicated the Environment Department's response to the situation, Lewis said.

Questions like: "Can the Environment Department legally close a nuclear waste dump it does not have the authority to regulate?" have been forwarded to the department's legal team, Lewis said.

The department has not ignored the dump, he said, and he expects NMED's latest RCRA permit for Los Alamos will address Area G and the hazardous waste there.

A draft of the permit, which will likely be unveiled with a public hearing this spring, is expected in the coming months, Lewis said.

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Activists call for nuke-dump closure

▶ *Attorney general's office says facility should have closed years ago*

By JEFF TOLLEFSON
The New Mexican

Twenty-seven activist groups on Tuesday called for the closure of the nuclear-waste dump at Los Alamos National Laboratory. The groups cited an earlier letter from the New Mexico attorney general's office indicating that the facility is out of compliance and should have been closed more than 16 years ago.

In a letter to New Mexico Environment Department Secretary Pete Maggiore, the Los Alamos Study Group and other organizations argue that Area G was never properly permitted under the federal Resource Recovery and Conservation Act.

Enforced by the New Mexico Environment Department, the Act sets forth requirements for managing hazardous wastes, which were once deposited along with nuclear waste in Area G. Federal law addresses nuclear waste separately from hazardous waste.

"Secretary Maggiore, we are writing to respectfully remind you of your long standing obligation to close Area G to further nuclear-waste disposal and begin a process of selecting (clean-up) remedies for the site," the groups wrote. Larger environmental groups like Forest Guardians and the Natural Resources Defense Council signed onto the letter with local organizations as El Rio Arriba Environmental Health Association.

The letter draws on comments by the Attorney General's office. LANL began the process of applying for a Resource Recovery and Conservation Act permit for Area G but withdrew its permit application in April 1985, according to a July 12 letter from the Attorney General's office.

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to the Environment Department. Once the application was withdrawn, according to the letter, Area G and another waste disposal facility should have been closed using the process set forth in RCRA.

"However, to date they have been neither closed nor permitted," Assistant Attorney General Lindsay Lovejoy, Jr., wrote in a letter to James Bearzi, who heads up NMED's Hazardous Waste Bureau.

Los Alamos Study Group Executive Director Greg Mello said LANL and state regulators have essentially bypassed federal hazardous-waste law since 1985, continuing with business as usual.

"And none of this has ever had a public hearing, so it's kind of a regulatory house of cards," Mello said.

LANL spokesman James Rickman said the laboratory is addressing Area G in its current application for a general RCRA permit, which would cover hazardous-waste management at sites throughout the laboratory. In the meantime, he said, the laboratory continues to use Area G for permanent storage of low-level radioactive waste, including certain less-active plutonium.

Rickman said the laboratory has been operating with full permission from the state environment department. "We are under what is called interim status, which allows us to continue operations out there."

Greg Lewis, director of the Water and Waste Management Division for the state, also said Area G will be addressed in the upcoming RCRA permit. He said the permit will establish how hazardous materials will — or won't — be handled throughout the laboratory for nearly a decade.

Los Alamos Study Group Executive Director Greg Mello said LANL and state regulators have essentially bypassed federal hazardous waste law since 1985, continuing with business as usual.

Additionally, the state also is developing a "corrective action order" that will lay the groundwork for how hazardous-waste contamination is characterized and eventually cleaned up at the laboratory. That document will address Area G as well, Lewis said, noting that he can't discuss the documents in detail until they are released in the coming months.

Lewis declined to comment specifically on the legality of Area G. He noted, however, that both the Attorney General and the activist groups have made "credible arguments" on the issue. Those arguments will be considered in the development of both the corrective action order and the RCRA permit, he said.

"We are looking at all of this happening within the next five to six months," Lewis said, stressing that both documents will be available for public review. "We are genuinely interested in getting input on this."

Public participation is required under hazardous-waste laws and is a major theme in assistant Attorney General's letter to the environment department. According to the letter, NMED generally has not opened up its own review processes regarding hazardous-waste permits and cleanup to public scrutiny.

"What particularly strikes us about this situation is that opportunities for public participation in determining the remedies for historical contamination have been almost nonexistent," Lovejoy wrote.

In an interview Tuesday, Lovejoy stressed that RCRA requires that the state develop a future closure plan for Area G, regardless of whether nuclear-waste operations continue. NMED is working to address the Attorney General's concerns about Area G in the current permit process, he said.

"It's a loose end. It's a very loose end," Lovejoy said. "They are aware of it, and they are going to be dealing with it, and we are going to be watching how that happens."

The Los Alamos Study Group is organizing a public really at 4:30 on Monday in the Capitol rotunda. Outreach Director Lydia Clark said the groups invited environment department officials as well as a few legislators and the governor.

Monday is the last day to comment on an annual cleanup schedule the environment department is currently presenting for LANL. Lewis said the state has agreed to accept comments through Jan. 21 on the work schedule but does not feel the document warrants public hearings — despite requests from the Study Group.

For more information, see www.nmenv.state.nm.us/hwb/pubnotice.html or call NMED at (505) 827-2855.

AG Threatens Action Over LANL Dump

Madrid awaiting decision by state Environment Department

By Jennifer McKee 1/22/02
Journal Staff Writer

If the Environment Department doesn't deal with a hazardous waste dump at Los Alamos National Laboratory to her satisfaction, Attorney General Patricia Madrid said she may take the matter to court.

But Madrid left unsaid just what she hoped the Environment Department would do with the dump — close it, clean it up or some yet-to-be-announced third option.

"I'm not ready to make any decisions right now," she said.

In the absence of a satisfactory approach, "we will pursue legal avenues," Madrid said at a rally Monday afternoon in the Roundhouse rotunda. The Los Alamos Study Group, one of 27 organizations that last week called on state Environment Department Secretary Pete Maggiore to close the dump, called the rally.

HERE ARE THE FIGURES: Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group lets numbers do the talking at the Roundhouse on Monday during a rally against continued operation of a hazardous waste dump at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

JOSH STEPHENSON, JOURNAL

The 27 groups say the dump, full of nuclear and hazardous waste, should have been closed almost 20 years ago, when the weapons lab stopped dumping hazardous waste at the site but never cleaned it up. The laboratory currently continues dumping nuclear waste, an activity beyond state regulation, at the site.

Madrid said she is content to wait on the

See **AG THREATENS** *on* **PAGE 2**

AG Threatens Action Over LANL Dump

from **PAGE 1**

Environment Department as it prepares to renew a hazardous waste dumping permit for the lab she hopes will address the old landfill.

Asked if anything less than closing the dump and cleaning it up would satisfy the Attorney General's Office, Assistant Attorney General Lindsay Lovejoy said he wouldn't discuss "hypotheticals."

At issue is a 45-year-old hazardous and nuclear waste dump called Area G at Los Alamos lab. The dump opened in 1957, before any federal laws governed the disposal of dangerous waste, both chemical and radioactive. In 1980, however, with passage of the federal Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, all hazardous waste dump operators were forced to obtain permits and prepare for cleaning up the dumps when they closed.

Los Alamos lab duly applied for a permit to operate Area G under RCRA. The lab received an interim permit in 1980 and continued dumping at the site until 1985, when the lab withdrew its permit and started shipping its hazardous waste elsewhere.

But the lab had operated a permitted hazardous waste dump for five years, from 1980 to 1985. And under the law, once a dump closes, it must either be cleaned up or stabilized so wastes don't leak out of the area, said Greg Mello, of the Los Alamos Study Group.

"In the lab's case, neither of those happened," Mello said at the rally.

The Attorney General's Office seems to agree.

Last summer, Lovejoy sent a letter to the Environment Department's Hazardous Waste Bureau pointing out that the dump was "out of regulatory compliance," Lovejoy said.

The Los Alamos lab still disposes of some hazardous waste, although not at Area G, and still holds a RCRA permit from the state. The Environment Department is in the process of issuing the lab its latest such permit.

Environment Department Secretary Pete Maggiore, also at Monday's rally, said he expects the department to announce details of the permit within a month. He said he would not discuss any of the ways the department will deal with the landfill until then.

Mello was not pleased and said he doesn't see how the Environment Department can satisfy the law with more meetings.

"We are losing sight of the importance of following the law in favor of more touchy-feely bureaucratic meetings that accomplish nothing," he said. "That's how we got in this mess."

Los Alamos Sierra Club Chapter Supports Biolab Plans

By Jennifer McKee 1/22/02
Journal Staff Writer

The Los Alamos chapter of the Sierra Club has formally endorsed an embattled proposal for a biological research facility at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

The chapter's position is not an official statement of the national Sierra Club organization, said Ilse Bleck, chairwoman of the Pajarito Group of the Sierra Club.

Los Alamos lab announced last spring that it intended to build a "Biosafety Level Three Laboratory" or BSL-3, where scientists could research more deadly organisms than currently allowed there. The proposed lab would be the first of its kind at an Energy Department weapons lab.

The Sierra Club group announced its endorsement in a letter to the editor to The Albuquerque Journal over the weekend.

Bleck said the group met in February with members of the lab to discuss possible environmental dangers the lab could pose.

"With all the safety procedures they had planned, we saw no reason not to support them," Bleck said.

The Energy Department is mulling whether a more extensive environmental study of the lab is necessary. Critics, both national and local, have argued the LANL safety and accident record doesn't bode well for more dangerous biological research.

Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group, one of the organizations that has come out against the proposed research lab, said the Pajarito Group's position is naive.

"It's well-meaning," Mello said.

Director Peggy Prince of Peace Action New Mexico, which also derided the proposal, said the Sierra Club's view further fuels the need for a more extensive environmental study of the research lab.

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Date:-01/22/2002 Section:-Metropolitan Edition:-Final Page:-D2

Sierra Club Chapter Endorses Lab

By Jennifer McKee Journal Northern Bureau

Pathogen Research Includes Anthrax

The Los Alamos chapter of the Sierra Club has formally endorsed an embattled proposal for a biological research facility at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

The chapter's position is not an official statement of the national Sierra Club organization, said Ilse Bleck, chairwoman of the Pajarito Group of the Sierra Club.

Los Alamos lab announced last spring it intended to build a "Biosafety Level Three Laboratory," or BSL-3, that would allow scientists to research more deadly organisms than currently allowed at the lab. Such laboratories are not uncommon in the United States, but the proposed lab would be the first of its kind at an Energy Department weapons lab.

The group announced its formal endorsement in a letter to the editor to the Albuquerque Journal over the weekend.

"LANL's work on infectious diseases and bio-terrorism is important," the letter read.

Bleck said the group invited some members of the lab to talk about the possible environmental dangers the lab could pose. The lab met with the club in February.

"With all the safety procedures they had planned (for the research lab), we saw no reason not to support them," Bleck said. "The lab gets no support from so many other groups. After we heard (the lab's) presentation, we saw no problem with the lab."

The research lab would be a safety grade higher than the current LANL facility and would allow scientists to study disease-causing pathogens such as the viruses that cause anthrax and plague, now currently off limits.

The research lab has not yet been built, and the Energy Department is in the process of deciding if a more extensive environmental study is necessary.

Critics, both national and local, have argued the LANL safety and accident record doesn't bode well for more dangerous biological research. They also say a weapons lab that receives the lion's share of its funding to maintain weapons of mass destruction is not an appropriate location for biological research on pathogens that could be used in weapons.

Bleck said she didn't think anyone at LANL would research biological agents for offensive purposes.

Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group, one of the organizations that has come out against the proposed research lab, said the Pajarito Group of the Sierra Club's position is naive.

"It's well-meaning," he said.

Director Peggy Prince of Peace Action New Mexico, which also derided the biological lab, said the Sierra Club's view further fuels the need for a more extensive environmental study of the research lab.

"Their endorsement is a little premature at this point," she said. "A full environmental impact statement is necessary to answer any lingering concerns."

Official: Labs at risk of terror attack

▶ *Security-agency administrator calls allegations 'false and misleading'*

By JEFF TOLLEFSON
The New Mexican 1/24/02

The old fear that the nation's own nuclear materials could one day be used against the United States took on new significance after last year's terrorist attacks.

Federal officials say the nuclear-weapons laboratories have instituted new security measures that more than adequately protect nuclear materials, but some fear the government isn't doing enough. Rep. Ed Markey, D.-Mass., on Wednesday again raised the specter of attacks against the nation's nuclear laboratories, citing the possibility that terrorists could break in, steal nuclear materials and detonate a crude nuclear bomb on site.

Markey released letters to the National Nuclear Security Administration and the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board. The letters raise questions about how the U.S. Department of Energy is managing "hundreds of tons" of weapons-grade nuclear material at 10 sites across the nation, including Los Alamos National Laboratory.

Markey cited an October report by the Project on Government Oversight questioning overall security measures at the laboratories. In particular, the report indicated that many mock terrorist attacks — conducted by the U.S. military — have succeeded in stealing weapons-grade nuclear material. Such operations successfully breached security in

Please see **LAB**, Page B-3

LAB

Continued from Page B-1

1997 and 2000 at Los Alamos, according to the report.

In response to Markey's letter, the National Nuclear Security Administration issued reassurances that the nuclear materials are indeed safe. In a written statement issued Wednesday, Agency Administrator John Gordon called allegations that security is lax at weapons facilities "false and misleading."

Gordon said the POGO report contributes to a "climate of fear grossly disproportionate to the risks to the public." Noting that budget cuts in the mid-1990s led to "degraded" security at the laboratories, he said the federal government has since enhanced its security measures, often through the use of mock terrorist operations that pinpoint security problems.

When the POGO report came out, Los Alamos officials defended security at Technical Area 18, a nuclear testing area where the mock terrorist operations took place. Nonetheless, the Department of Energy currently is conducting an environmental-impact statement on a proposal to relocate TA 18 to a more secure location.

LANL officials on Wednesday referred questions to the National Nuclear Security Administration, which declined to discuss any details about security at LANL. Spokeswoman Lisa Cutler said new security measures remain in effect after Sept. 11.

Los Alamos Study Group Executive Director Greg Mello said the possibility of a terrorist attack at TA 18 should not be dismissed, even though terrorists certainly could find easier targets than LANL if they wanted to steal nuclear material. The Department of Energy should review operations at TA 18 in light of security risks posed by the facility, he said.

"There needs to be a very disciplined look at the costs and benefits of activities at TA 18," Mello said.

Time to blow the whistle

1/24/02 Tribune

Larry Spohn's recent series on the National Ignition Facility, the most expensive experimental facility in the Department of Energy's wide-ranging campaign to advance nuclear weapons science, was outstanding in every way.

NIF will cost taxpayers tens of billions of dollars, yet will never "work" as originally intended, either as a whole or in several of its key parts. It would be irrelevant to maintaining the reliability of nuclear weapons, even if it did work.

This huge debacle could have been averted if even a few scientists involved with the project had spoken up about what they knew. It could also have been avoided if scientists, involved in formal project reviews and who covered up serious technical flaws on many occasions, had acted more honorably. Many of those scientists, as it turned out, were financially or otherwise involved with the project or with related Department of Energy projects.

Unfortunately, misrepresentation and fraud is commonplace at the DOE nuclear labs, and coverup is more normal than most people might think is possible. Secrecy has many uses. Perhaps the NIF fiasco will spur other investigations.

To pick one example among many: A sister project to NIF at Los Alamos, called DARHT, has, according to DOE, experienced a cost inflation of 900

Please see **NIF/C3**

NIF *from C1*

percent and a project delay of 12 years so far. Even now, half the project's capability — and its main *raison d'etre* given other facilities that were already available — has not yet come on line.

Yet Los Alamos officials continue to describe the project as "on time and on budget" to Congress, the news media and to themselves. Meanwhile, they are spending several tens of millions designing an upgrade to DARHT's capabilities, one which will cost, they estimate, about $1.2 billion to install and much more to operate, assuming it works at all.

Why doesn't Congress do something? New Mexico's senators have known about the problems at NIF and other projects for years, but they don't want to interfere with appropriations for "their own" labs. They see the labs' appropriations, rightly or wrongly, as integral to the state's economic development, an assumption that surely begs for close scrutiny, given the realities.

Peer review, from the staff scientist on up to the Senate, has come to mean "I won't attack your project if you won't attack mine." This is not science, and it's not really public service, either.

Again, congratulations to Spohn and The Tribune for this fine reporting.

Greg Mello
Director,
Los Alamos Study Group
Los Alamos

Bomb Threat at Lab Raised

[Study Group provided this info]

■ *Congressman worries materials at LANL could be used to create nuke blast*

By Jennifer McKee 1/24/02
Journal Staff Writer

Places like the Los Alamos Critical Experiments Facility might pose more of a danger than previously thought, said a Massachusetts congressman on Wednesday adding, for example, that an impromptu bomb could be built from materials housed there.

The head of the National Nuclear Security Administration, the semi-autonomous arm of the Department of Energy that oversees the nation's nuclear labs, panned the suggestion.

Rep. Ed Markey, D-Mass., sent a letter critical of nuclear security and several pages of questions about security changes made since Sept. 11 to DOE Secretary Spencer Abraham on Wednesday.

During comments at a news conference Wednesday, Markey said terrorists could build a "dirty bomb" or worse yet, a homemade, impromptu nuclear bomb at one of the sites. Such a bomb, made by dropping one mass of nuclear material such as uranium on another, could produce a detonation similar to a small nuclear weapon, according to Markey.

Furthermore, he said, the walls of the "vaults" that house such materials are sometimes made of drywall and could be easily punctured by a truck bomb nearby.

Los Alamos National Laboratory houses some 20 metric tons of nuclear materials at Technical Area 18, although the exact amount of such materials is classified. TA-18 has also taken hits lately over a 1997 mock terrorist battle in which the terrorists made off with nuclear materials from the site.

But John Gordon, head of the NNSA, said his agency is well acquainted with bomb-making physics and adequately protects those materials.

"While we welcome serious inquiries into the department's security practices, it is unfortunate that some try to create a climate of fear grossly disproportionate to the risks to the public," Gordon said in a prepared statement. "Such unfounded allegations are a disservice to the communities that are home to our national defense facilities."

According to the letter Markey sent to Abraham, a "homemade" nuclear bomb slightly less powerful than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima could be made from dropping a 100 pound mass of uranium onto another 100-pound mass from a distance of 6 feet.

Markey has asked Abraham to move all the nation's stored nuclear materials to a central location, rather than spread them throughout the nation.

AG issues warning on work plan at Los Alamos

1/25/02

By JEFF TOLLEFSON
The New Mexican

The New Mexico attorney general this week issued another warning to the state Environment Department for failure to allow sufficient public participation during consideration of an annual work plan for cleanup activities at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

While crediting the Environment Department with moving the cleanup schedule forward in the proposed work plan, a letter from the attorney general's office to Hazardous Waste Bureau Chief James Bearzi stated the department's public process failed to meet requirements set forth in hazardous-waste laws.

In the letter dated Wednesday, Assistant Attorney General Lindsay Lovejoy also said the department failed to make the work plan accessible to the average reader.

"The proposed LANL work schedule is almost unintelligible, except to one who has assiduously and continuously studied corrective action at Los Alamos," Lovejoy wrote, noting the document relies on technical language and numeric references to cleanup sites. "The stated requirements are so cursory that the public cannot tell what is being demanded."

In the letter dated Wednesday, Assistant Attorney General Lindsay Lovejoy also said the department failed to make the work plan accessible to the average reader.

Department Spokeswoman Cathy Tyson said her agency appreciates the attorney general's comments and will consider them in the final decision. Tyson declined to go into further detail.

Department officials have previously said the annual work plan is more of a scheduling document rather than a major revision to the laboratory's hazardous-waste permit. In such a case, the department would not be required to follow the standard public-participation process.

Nonetheless, the Environment Department accepted public comments through Monday on the annual work plan.

The department decided against holding a public meeting to explain the work plan, as requested by local activist groups.

In his letter, Lovejoy sided with the activists, arguing the work plan constitutes a significant action that must allow for public participation.

The department is currently working on a overarching permit that details whether, how and where hazardous wastes will be handled during the next decade at the laboratory as well as a corrective-action order that details cleanup requirements throughout the laboratory. Department officials say they will solicit public participation on both of those documents.

Speaking at a rally organized by the Los Alamos Study Group on Monday, Attorney General Patricia Madrid said her office would keep an eye on the process.

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AG: More Public Input Was Needed on Lab Plan

Office Cites Law On Hazardous Waste

The Associated Press

LOS ALAMOS — The state attorney general says the Environment Department did not allow sufficient public participation during consideration of an annual work plan for cleanup activities at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

Attorney General Patricia Madrid's office issued a warning in a letter to the state department this week.

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[We have been teaching Jeff, sending him other press, & connecting him to Bob S.]

Santa Fe El Norte

B

THE SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN

Sunday

JANUARY 27, 2002

www.santafenewmexican.com

DOE to release environmental review

▶ *Activists say document will set stage for cutting cleanup funds*

By JEFF TOLLEFSON
The New Mexican

The U.S. Department of Energy expects to release as soon as next week a "top-to-bottom" review of cleanup operations and obligations throughout the national-defense complex.

Activists are gearing up for a fight, expecting the Bush administration to cut the legs out from underneath the Environmental Management program even as overall defense spending increases. Officials with the New Mexico Environment Department's DOE Oversight Bureau, which is funded by the DOE, are wary of further cuts to next year's budget.

Bob Schaeffer, public-education director for the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability in Washington, cited a memorandum from the assistant secretary for Environmental Management indicating that the DOE is looking to hasten cleanup and decrease costs by at least $100 billion nationally. According to current estimates, he said, overall cleanup costs could be as high as $250 billion.

Local activists often criticize LANL for inefficiencies that lead to a lot of unnecessary spending and paperwork, but Schaeffer and others fear the Bush administration's effort to prioritize activities and cull wasteful spending could translate into less on-the-ground remediation.

In a recent report, the DOE Office of Inspector General called the review process encouraging, suggesting that such a project could make for a "more efficient and responsive cleanup effort."

Officials with the Department of Energy in Los Alamos and Albuquerque say the Environmental Management review — almost a year in

Please see **CLEANUP,** Page B-5

CLEANUP

Continued from Page B-1

the making — is scheduled for release next week. The report could play a significant role in determining the president's budget proposals for next year.

Last year, the president's budget proposed $119 million for Environmental Management under the Albuquerque office, according to George Rael, director of the Environmental Restoration Division. Rael said Albuquerque requested $156 million and ultimately received $138 million after Congress restored funding for the Environmental Management program.

The Albuquerque office oversees cleanup at Los Alamos National Laboratory and several other sites in New Mexico, Texas, California and Kansas. Rael said an annual appropriation of $160 million would help the Albuquerque DOE save money in the long run by completing projects more quickly, but every office is competing for a limited pot of money in Washington.

Last year, the president proposed to cut the program by $465 million — about 10 percent — but Congress restored "every cent," according to Schaeffer of the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability.

He called Congress' decision to fund Environmental Management over and above the president's request a "remarkable example of bipartisanship," predicting yet another struggle this year if the Bush administration moves to cut cleanup funding.

"It's going to be another loud political fight, one that I suspect the administration is going to lose," Schaeffer said.

Meanwhile, the state's DOE oversight bureau has already had to transfer employees out of the program because of budget cuts, according to Bureau Chief John Parker. Through an agreement with the Environment Department, DOE funds the Oversight Bureau to oversee department activities.

At its height several years ago, the bureau had a budget of more than $3 million, more than double the current budget, Parker said. Parker said a $2 million budget would allow him to run a complete program, although he fears next year's budget could be half that.

He says he has assurances from the DOE that $725,000 is the absolute minimum.

"We have an agreement and we have statements from DOE people in Albuquerque that they support this program ... but we also recognize that environmental management does not appear to be a priority of this administration," Parker said recently.

"It's not like the state is receiving less DOE money. ... It's just that the environmental-management side is shrinking."

Joe Vozella, DOE assistant area manager for the environment in Los Alamos, stressed that the agency supports the state's oversight bureau, which boosts public confidence in LANL's environmental program. Nonetheless, he added, appropriators in Washington decide how much money is available.

POGO → Study Group → Jennifer

Lab Employee Had Missing Computer Disk

1/30/02

By Jennifer McKee
Journal Staff Writer

A missing computer disk at Los Alamos National Laboratory, possibly holding "sensitive or classified information," turned up Tuesday afternoon.

Turns out the disk, missing since last week, was in a lab employee's possession, said spokesman John Gustafson, and was "properly and securely handled at all times." The disk's absence was discovered during an ongoing inventory by the Nuclear Materials Technology Division, according to lab spokesman Jim Danneskiold.

Lab officials never believed the disk had left secure areas of LANL, Danneskiold said. Rather, the disk could not be immediately accounted for, although Danneskiold said lab officials believed the disk would be found as the inventory progressed.

Danneskiold said the lab doesn't know exactly what is on the disk. Since last February, the laboratory has put bar codes on all so-called "removable electronic media," like computers, hard drives and even blank computer disks, anything that could contain classified information. The move was prompted by an Energy Department directive after two high-profile security lapses at the lab in 2000: disclosures that fired lab scientist Wen Ho Lee had downloaded classified information from the lab onto portable tapes, and the case of the lost-and-found hard drives containing nuclear weapons information that disappeared for weeks in the summer that year.

In this case, Danneskiold said, the disk in question could be blank, it could contain something mundane like scheduling information, or it could hold "other information that may be sensitive or classified."

One thing is sure, however, he said: The disk does not contain "sensitive classified data involving weapons design information," as alleged earlier Tuesday by the Project on Government Oversight, a watchdog organization.

The lab reported the disk missing to the Energy Department, another move required by lab rules.

Nonetheless, Peter Stockton, a Project on Government Oversight consultant and former special assistant to then-Energy Secretary Bill Richardson evaluating cyber and physical security, said the incident is telling.

"This is another event in a long series of events that raises serious question as to whether the University of California is capable of managing the labs,"

See **LOS ALAMOS** *on* **PAGE 3**

Los Alamos Lab Employee Had Missing Computer Disk

from **PAGE 1**

he said.

University of California spokesman Jeff Garberson said the "university takes security extremely seriously and will wait until the matter is thoroughly investigated before having more to say."

The incident also caught the eye of Rep. Edward Markey, D-Mass., who has repeatedly urged Energy Department Secretary Spencer Abraham to beef up security at Los Alamos lab and other DOE nuclear sites around the country.

"This incident only underscores the need for a top-to-bottom revamping of security at DOE facilities," Markey said Tuesday. "That's why I wrote DOE last week, and while they may want to discount the risk, it is real and cannot be ignored."

The news came just days after the lab's most famous lost-and-found case was resolved for good. Two computer hard drives containing nuclear information went missing during the Cerro Grande Fire, which in early May of 2000, burned over the lab and devoured 354 residences in town.

The tapes were not reported missing for almost a month. They were found in July of 2000 behind a laboratory copying machine.

Although the FBI investigated the case and several lab employees were placed on administrative leave, the U.S. Attorney's Office announced last week no criminal charges would be filed in the case.

POGO -> Study Group -> Jeff

LANL locates missing disk in inventory

▶ *Lab says disk did not contain nuclear-weapons design data* 1/30/02

By JEFF TOLLEFSON
The New Mexican

Los Alamos National Laboratory has located a computer disk that turned up missing during a periodic inventory by the Nuclear Materials Technology Division, the laboratory reported Tuesday.

The lab's announcement followed on the heels an assertion by the Project on Government Oversight, a watchdog group based in Washington, D.C., that materials containing nuclear-weapons secrets might be missing.

Denying the disk contained "sensitive highly classified data" about weapons design, the laboratory initially confirmed in a written statement the missing disk was among "some minor discrepancies with previous inventories." Later in the evening, spokesman John Gustafson said the disk had been located.

"It was in the possession of another staff member, and it had been properly secured at all times," Gustafson said. "The purpose of an inventory is to ensure accountability of all items, and often there are discrepancies at the start of the inventory that are fully resolved when it is concluded."

Gustafson said he did not know how often such inventories take place. He also said he did not know what was on the disk.

In its initial response, the lab stressed the disk did not contain the highly classified weapons-design information but conceded its contents were unknown. Possibilities range from nothing to "scheduling information to information that may be sensitive or classified," according to the statement.

In Washington, POGO Executive Director Danielle Brian said she stood by her organization's report that the missing disk contained nuclear-weapons design. That information came from a single but reliable source at the laboratory, according to POGO officials, who point out that this isn't the first time such problems have arisen at Los Alamos.

The national spotlight initially focused on computer security at Los Alamos in 1999 because of scientist Wen Ho Lee, who eventually pleaded guilty to downloading classified nuclear-weapons information.

Last week, the U.S. attorney concluded an investigation into computer hard drives that turned up missing for a period of weeks in the spring of 2000. The drives were eventually found behind a copy machine. No one was charged after the investigation.

Brian said the fact such information can turn up missing is further evidence the laboratory needs to implement new security measures to keep track of nuclear secrets. The laboratory could institute a computer system that gives access only to monitors and keyboards, requiring two people to access the computers.

"Why don't they move to a system where this kind of data isn't misplaceable?" she asked. "They need to move away from a system where people can access on an individual bases this kind of data."

LANL's Gustafson said he could not discuss such security issues.

Bush proposal has Domenici optimistic about budget

1/31/02

By JEFF TOLLEFSON
The New Mexican

New Mexico's senior senator says he finally has the Bush administration on board to boost defense spending.

"We're going to get a very good, fully funded budget from the administration, one that we can almost live with," Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., said Thursday, following a news conference at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

President Bush is scheduled to present his budget proposal for the country on Monday, at which point the year's budget negotiations will go into full swing. Last Year, Domenici noted, Congress added $500 million to the administration's budget proposals for nuclear weapons, bringing the grand total to $5.8 billion for nuclear weapons and stockpile stewardship. An aide to Domenici said the president's budget is expected to come in at $5.8 billion or higher on Monday.

Domenici also touted an agreement he has reached with the administration to propose $300 million to improve building infrastructure throughout the Department of Energy's weapons complex. Although the administration proposed nothing for the program last year, Domenici said Congress secured $200 million by the time the budget passed.

Now, he says, the administration has committed to a long-term program to address the sagging infrastructure, a problem Domenici estimated at $10 billion. Aides said the administration plans to spend $300-$700 million annually for an undetermined number of years for overall infrastructure.

Overall for the laboratories in New Mexico, Domenici said, that translates to

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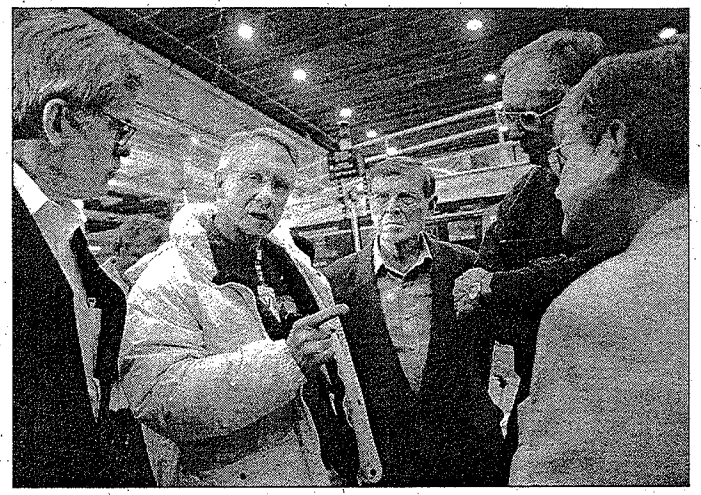

From left, Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., Gen. John Gordon and Jill Trewihella, leader of the Bioscience Division at Los Alamos National Laboratory, take part in a tour of Los Alamos Laboratory on Thursday.

The Associated Press

LAB

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more than $3 billion annually, split about equally between Los Alamos and Sandia National Laboratories in Albuquerque. However, Los Alamos officials confirmed Thursday the lab's overall budget tops $2 billion this year.

For many watchdog groups that already criticize the Department of Energy's weapons program as a bloated bureaucracy, the announcement does not come as good news.

Organizations such as the Los Alamos Study Group argue that increased spending does not translate into economic development for Northern New Mexico. And such things as environmental cleanup have stagnated as the laboratory boosts its nuclear-weapons program.

Domenici toured Los Alamos with Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., and Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., the current majority whip in the U.S. Senate and chairman of the subcommittee that oversees DOE spending at the national laboratories. Gen. Leslie Gordon, who heads up the National Nuclear Security Administration, also attended.

The theme of Thursday's tour was homeland security, and the senators were briefed on both classified and unclassified research ranging from detection systems for biological terrorism to nonproliferation efforts.

AWA / Study Group partnership here

DOE proposes to expedite cleanup nationally

▶ *Activist groups remain skeptical of incentive program for nuclear-waste cleanup*

By JEFF TOLLEFSON
The New Mexican

The Bush administration on Thursday proposed the creation of an $800 million account to fund expedited cleanup agreements throughout the nuclear-weapons complex.

Department of Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham announced the incentive program during a visit to a cleanup site in Fernald, Ohio, where the agency purified uranium for nuclear weapons. Citing the "old plan" that pegs cleanup costs at $300 billion for 70 years nationally, Abraham suggested his new approach could save taxpayers billions of dollars by quickly prioritizing and completing important projects.

"The price tag is staggering, but that didn't bother me nearly as much as the idea of 70 years," Abraham said. "It's not good enough."

He used the DOE's cleanup of Rocky Flats as a model for the future: Cleanup once estimated to require 65 years and $35 billion is now scheduled for completion in 2006, 55 years early and $29 billion under budget.

Activist groups remain skeptical of what they see as a healthy dose of cleanup rhetoric, saying Monday's budget rollout should provide a better idea of what the administration is proposing.

"The solution that he sketched out here, and the proof will be in the budget, has a number of potential flaws, depending on the details," said Bob Schaeffer of the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability in Washington, D.C. Schaeffer said the expedited cleanup account might be nothing more than "a pot to bribe states that have binding cleanup agreements" into relaxing cleanup requirements to speed up the process.

In the case of Rocky Flats, the DOE has lowered the bar for plutonium cleanup, making it easier to wrap the site up and walk away, Schaeffer said. "They are going to leave more plutonium in the soil."

Abraham said the $800 million account would be in addition to the regular budget of $5.9 million for Environmental Management, bringing the total request to $6.7 million. Last year, the Bush administration asked for $5.9 million, although Congress boosted that by several hundred thousand dollars. DOE officials could not immediately provide the final budget figures.

Abraham said those sites that tap into the funds must establish a realistic timeframe to complete the cleanup, stressing that the additional funds do not amount to a "license for unending cleanups and open-ended budgets."

Officials in Albuquerque said they didn't yet know how the proposal would impact cleanup at Los Alamos National Laboratory and other sites that fall under Albuquerque's umbrella.

Depending on how the numbers work out, the standard budget — excluding the $800 million incentive money — could be less than this year, according to Schaeffer, who says he is less worried about budget figures than on-the-ground cleanup.

"It's that kind of stuff that leads to lots of questions about what's really going on here," Schaeffer said. "Who knows what this means for Los Alamos. It's just more talk at this stage."

Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., said during a news conference at Los Alamos on Thursday he expects the administration's budget to fall short on funds for the environmental-management program. Like last year, Domenici added, he and others in Congress will push for more.

LANL Execs No-Shows At Senate Panel Meet

By Morgan Lee 2/2/02
Journal Staff Writer

Five New Mexico legislators heard some strong opinions from critics of Los Alamos National Laboratory on Tuesday after administrators of the nuclear weapons laboratory did not attend a committee meeting in the state Capitol.

"I think it's an insult to the legislators here and employees here that the lab wouldn't even come down and listen to our complaints," said Jelger Kalmijn of Berkeley, Calif., the president of the University of California Professional and Technical Employees.

A LANL spokesman said after the meeting that lab officials received notice of Friday's meeting too late to work it into their schedules.

The nuclear weapons laboratory in Los Alamos has been supervised since 1943 by the University of California and legislators from California have a tradition of meeting with New Mexico's Senate Select Committee on Oversight of the Department of Energy Laboratories. The labs are operated by the University of California.

But California legislators and lab administrators did not attend Friday's meeting, leaving a vocal audience alone with legislators, who said the meeting might be rescheduled later in the year.

In anticipation of the committee meeting, protesters gathered on a cold, clear morning outside the entrance to the Capitol, some with signs protesting the lab's waste disposal practices and exemption from the state gross receipts tax.

"You pay taxes, why doesn't LANL?" said one sign among several that were checked with a receptionist before the 8:30 a.m. meeting.

LANL spokesman John Gustafson said members of the lab's senior management received notice of Friday's meeting only on Wednesday and "couldn't work it into their

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Lab Officials No-Shows At Senate Panel Meeting

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schedules."

He said lab officials originally intended to attend a meeting Friday with officials from both California and New Mexico, but that meeting was canceled Tuesday. By the time they were notified that New Mexico lawmakers still wanted to meet Friday, their schedules were full, Gustafson said.

But he said lab officials will be "happy to meet with state legislators at any convenient time."

Sen. Manny Aragon, D-Albuquerque, told a full meeting room that he was disappointed that the lab had not sent representatives. Also in attendance were Reps. Jeannette Wallace, R-Los Alamos; Luciano "Lucky" Varela, D-Santa Fe; Ben Lujan, D-Santa Fe; and Roberto "Bobby" Gonzales, D-Taos. The committee met for about 30 minutes.

2/12/02

LANL hearing cut short

Craig Fritz/The New Mexican

Although a hearing on Los Alamos National Laboratory attracted a standing-room-only crowd of people eager to talk about their concerns, the hearing was cut short Friday. State Senate Majority Leader Manny Aragon, D-Albuquerque, and House Speaker Ben Luján, D-Nambé, who were supposed to preside at the hearing, told the crowd that legislators had other business to attend to. In addition, a group of California legislators who oversee the University of California's management of LANL did not show up as planned. The Los Alamos Study Group, a watchdog group, held a demonstration at the Capitol before the committee meeting.

LEGISLATURE

Cancelled hearing: A platform for dissent

◆ *State legislators voice support for LANL citizens advisory group*

We organized to pack this hearing, assisting with the result noted.

By ROGER SNODGRASS
lamonitor@lamonitor.com
Monitor Assistant Editor

3
2/16/02

SANTA FE — Los Alamos National Laboratory was off the hook but on the griddle Friday, as critics took advantage of a half-cancelled legislative hearing to press their grievances before a small group of legislators at the State Capitol.

A scheduled hearing of the Senate Select Committee on the Oversight of the Department of Energy Laborites operated by the University of California was held as planned, even though legislators from California were unable to attend what had been billed as a joint legislative hearing.

Venting frustrations after at least three cancelled hearings dating back several months, labor, human rights and environmental groups, along with individual watchdogs, had the floor to themselves in an abbreviated meeting.

Lab officials said later than they had understood the hearing was cancelled, and by the time they heard that it was not, laboratory representatives were not available to attend. Staff from Rep. Tom Udall's office attended the meeting to say that Udall also had been thrown off by the change in schedule.

Provost C. Judson King or Robert Van Ness, vice president of laboratory management, had been expected to participate in a panel on the university's contract with DOE, along with Joseph Salgado, LANL's chief deputy director, Director Charles Shank of Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, and a representative from Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. Salgado was also slated to participate in a panel on workforce issues at LANL.

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DISSENT

From Page A1

A 10-minute public comment period had been scheduled. Instead, there was nothing but public comment for more than 30 minutes from the standing-room-only audience.

Sen. Majority Leader Manny Aragon, D-Albuquerque, House Speaker Rep. Ben Lujan, D-Santa Fe, Rep. Luciano "Lucky" Varela, D-Santa Fe, Jeanette Wallace, R-Los Alamos, and Debbie Rodella, D-San Juan Pueblo, listened to comments from the floor before excusing themselves to join ongoing sessions in their respective chambers.

Elaine Cimino, director of the La Cienega Valley Citizens for Environmental Safeguards, found interest among the legislators in her proposal to establish a "Citizens Senate Select Advisory Committee," a monthly forum that would work on issues related to the laboratories and "formulate recommendations" for the Senate Select Committee.

Aragon and Varela expressed interest in presenting a memorial in favor of such a citizens board to the legislature.

"Just the fact that you took the time to be here shows that there are problems at the lab," said Lujan. "We want you to have an audience. You would be simply preaching to the choir."

The groups opposed to various aspects of laboratory policies and operations began the morning with a demonstration in front of the Roundhouse.

Some gave condensed versions of points they had hoped to raise during the full hearing.

Jelger Kalmijn, president of Union of Professional and Technical Employees-Communications Workers of America Local 9119, said he had planned to discuss, among several points, what he called "a generalized fear of retaliation and discrimination" among lab employees, ineffectiveness of the lab's merit pay system, and the lab's utilization of contract labor.

Members of the Hispanic Round Table and Citizens for LANL Employee Rights touched on issues of diversity and discrimination.

There were also objections to the lab's ongoing environmental impacts and militarism, special tax exemptions and other privileges.

A hearing of the New Mexico and California legislative committees is expected to be rescheduled, but not before the current legislative session ends.

（第三種郵便物認可）

21世紀 核時代 負の遺産 ⑰ アメリカ編

ロスアラモス国立研究所 下

小型核兵器の開発進む

市民 足元から「ノー」訴え

「それはここから始まった。ここから中止させよう」と訴えるロスアラモス研究グループが作ったステッカー。サンタフェ市内と周辺の主要道路には、これを含めデザイン・文言を変えた5種類の看板が立つ

こぢんまりとしたサンタフェの繁華街を抜け、車で十五分ほど走ると、ニューメキシコ州環境局が入る州政府ビルがあった。州権限でロスアラモス国立研究所の環境規制に当たる部署である。

「規制といっても、われわれの権限が及ぶのは化学的有害物質が含まれているときだけ。放射性物質のみのときは、州に権限がなく手の打ちようがない」

二階会議室で会った水・廃棄物管理部長のグレッグ・ルイスさん（63）は、戸惑いがちに言った。同席したルイスさんの部下で有害・放射性物質を扱うジェームズ・ベアージさん（41）が付け加えた。

「われわれは研究所近くの試験井戸などからトリチウム（三重水素）やストロンチウム90の放射性物質を検出している。しかし研究所では、連邦基準より低い値だからといって取り合おうとしない。問題は、すでにこうした物質が流れ出る経路ができてしまっていることなんだが…」

一九九二年に「連邦施設規制法」が議会で通過し、州政府にも一定の権限が生まれた。が、核開発に伴う「秘密性」「安全保障」とも絡んだ放射性物質は除外されるなど極めて限られた領域だった。

ルイスさんらによると、ロスアラモス研究所は、これまで大量の放射性物質を投棄してきた「エリアG」に新たな廃棄物貯蔵施設をつくる計画だという。

「研究所の施設内では、貯蔵する場所がなくなっている。新たな廃棄物施設の建設は、今後も核開発が進められるということ。われわれにもっと大きな権限が与えられない限り、ジレンマが深まるばかりだよ」。そう言って肩をすくめるベアージさんに、ルイスさんも無言でうなずいた。

これではまっとうな環境対策など望むべくもない。さむざむとした思いを抱いて州政府ビルを後にした。が、サンタフェの街中に戻り、市民組織「ロスアラモス研究グループ」の小さな事務所で会ったグレッグ・メロー代表（52）の話は、一層、ショッキングだった。

「ロスアラモス研究所の使命は、核兵器の研究開発を永遠に続けることだ。環境問題などそれを阻害する要因ぐらいにしか思っていない」

一八八センチの長身のメローさんは、机上に広げた資料を前に、厳しい口調で言った。

カリフォルニア州出身。大学卒業後、サンタフェに移り住み、環境団体などで働きながら、禅修行を重ねてきた。八九年に研究グループを設立し、九二年からフルタイムで活動を続ける。

「九一年末にソ連が崩壊して冷戦が終わった。九五年度のロスアラモス研究所の核兵器関連予算は、六億ドル（約七百二十億円）まで下がった。しかし、それ以後徐々に復活し、二〇〇一年度はすでに二・三倍の十三億四千万ドル（約千六百億円）、〇二年度は十五億ドル（約千八百億円）にまで増えている」

メローさんによれば、予算の急激な増加は新たな核兵器開発や、従来の核兵器の改造などが主な理由だという。

「米政府も担当のエネルギー省も、国内外の世論に向けては核軍縮のポーズを取りながら、現場サイドでは新しい核兵器の開発に努めてきた。『核兵器の安全性と信頼性確保のためのプログラム』の名の下に行ってきた臨界前核実験は、単に既存兵器の性能を確かめるためだけではない。核兵器の改造や開発につながっているのだ」

メローさんは、膨大な資料の中から、ロスアラモス研究所の核兵器開発担当最高責任者だったスティーブン・ヤンガー前副所長の講演資料を取り出した。九九年六月、従業員を対象に行った内向けのものである。それだけに、より率直に核開発への胸のうちがにじみ出ていた。

「この研究所は、アメリカが保有するほとんどの核兵器に対し、どこよりも責任を負っている」

「核兵器はアメリカの国家利益にとって至上のものだ。もしわれわれが、条約（包括的核実験禁止条約）に署名し、上院議会で批准してそれにリボンをつけようとも、至上の国家利益を体現するためには、条約から抜け出し、核実験を再開できる。むろん、国家の要請があればのことだが…」

首都ワシントンの国防総省防衛脅威削減局長に転身したヤンガーさんの訴えは、決して一科学者の願望を体現したものではない、とメローさんは強調する。

「そこには軍部や民間の指導者層を含む、核兵器を取り巻く体制側の思いが示されている。ロスアラモスの関係者が『顧客』と呼んでいる人たちだよ」

地下核実験再開の背景にあるのは、何よりも地下深くまで潜り込み、その後に爆発する使用可能な小型核兵器の開発である。

「ロスアラモスの科学者たちは、臨界前核実験だけでは完全に新しい核兵器は完成できないと考えている。実際の実験によって、成功するかどうか確認する必要があるのだ」とメローさん。

小型核兵器の必要性は、イラクや朝鮮民主主義人民共和国（北朝鮮）など、いわゆる「ならずもの国家」を対象に、地下の司令部やミサイル基地などをたたこうというものである。

「クリントン時代から続いていた要求が、二〇〇一年初頭のブッシュ共和党政権誕生で勢いを増し、九月十一日の米中枢同時多発テロ事件以後、一気にその機運が高まってしまった」と、メローさんは懸念を強める。

ブッシュ政権は、一月初旬に議会に核戦略に関する報告書「核体制の見直し」を提出し、ネバダ核実験場での二年以内の地下核実験再開の必要性を説いた。この時機なら核実験再開を明確に打ち出しても、国内はむろん、国際世論もそれほど強い反対は起きない、と踏んでのことだろう。

ロスアラモス研究所は、半世紀以上にわたって核兵器の研究開発の中心だった。しかし、これからは汚染のために閉鎖されたロッキーフラッツ核工場（コロラド州）に代わって、水爆の起爆装置のプルトニウム・ピットの製造も計画しているという。

「研究施設だけでなく、製造工場の役割も担おうというわけだ。すでにプルトニウム・ピットのテスト製造は進んでいる。新しい工場をつくり、本格的な製造にかかるのも、それほど遠いことではないだろう」と、メローさんは推測する。

ロスアラモス研究所では、より性能の高いスーパーコンピューター導入のための建設工事も進められている。研究所の機能拡大が、核拡散防止条約（NPT）や包括的核実験禁止条約（CTBT）の精神に反し、この地上に再び核競争や核拡散を勢いづかせることなどおかまいなしだ。

ニューメキシコ州には、州内最大の都市アルバカーキにもう一つの核兵器研究所がある。「サンディア国立研究所」である。ロスアラモス研究所などで考案されたアイデアを、いわば使用可能な兵器へと具現化するのが、この研究所の主要な目的だ。

「地元の長老上院議員の強大な政治力も働いて、二つの研究所だけで年間三十億ドル（約三千六百億円）以上の予算がつく。人口百六十万人のニューメキシコ州にとって、それがどれほど巨額であるか想像がつくだろう」

だが、両研究所に投入される巨費は、必ずしも州の豊かさにはつながらない。今もニューメキシコ州は全米で最も貧しい州の一つに数えられ、教育レベルも低いとされる。ロスアラモスの高校は全米トップクラスでも、貧しい先住民やヒスパニック系の少数民族の子どもたちは高校へも行けない現実があるからだ。

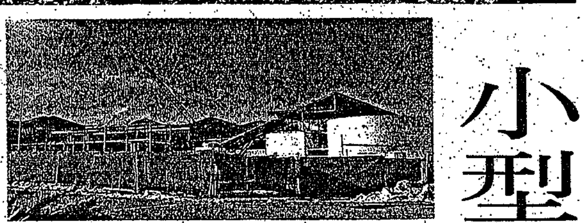
「ニューメキシコ州は、まさに『核のコロニー』だよ。しかし、富はロスアラモス研究所を運営するカリフォルニア大学など一部の機関や人びとにのみ入る」。メローさんは、そこに社会的不公平を見てとる。

個人的な寄付などで支えられる反核運動や環境問題に取り組む地元のグループも、強大な核体制を突き動かすだけの力はない。その現実を見据えながら、メローさんはなお明るい声で言った。

「われわれは少数でも、足元にとどまり反対の声を上げ続ける。実態を世界に伝える役割もある。日本など世界中から人びとがやって来て、ロスアラモス研究所に一緒に『ノー』を突きつけたい」

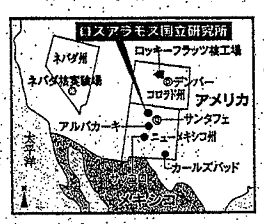
でなければ、核兵器はなくならない。「禅の心」を知るメローさんの、それが私たちへのメッセージでもあった。

（文と写真　編集委員・田城明）



建設中のスーパーコンピューター施設。核開発に伴うロスアラモス研究所の機能は、拡大を続ける　（ロスアラモス市）

「放射性物質も規制できるようになれば」と話すグレッグ・ルイスさん㊧とジェームズ・ベアージさん　（サンタフェ市）



ロスアラモス研究所の地図を広げ、各施設の役割を説明するグレッグ・メローさん　（サンタフェ市）

ニューメキシコ州の核施設

ロスアラモス、サンディア両国立研究所のほかに、核兵器開発の「核のごみ」を永久貯蔵埋設するための「廃棄物隔離パイロットプラント」（WIPP）が、州南東部カールズバッド市郊外の砂漠地帯にある。

エネルギー省が1975年以来、20億ドル（約2400億円）をかけて、6.4キロ四方の敷地に地下約650メートルの岩塩層をくりぬいて貯蔵所を建設。住民の反対で長く搬入できなかったが、99年春から稼働を始めた。ロスアラモス研究所などから一部が搬入されている。

サッコロ市にあるニューメキシコ州立工科大学付属のエネルギー物質研究試験センターでは、放射能兵器である劣化ウラン弾の研究や試射実験が行われてきた。

サンディア研究所のあるカークランド空軍基地近くには、2500個以上の核弾頭が保管されている「全米最大」と言われる地下施設がある。

Newspaper: Chugoku Shimbun

Tri-Valley Herald

WEDNESDAY
February 6, 2002

Lab seeks to expand pathogen research

Lawrence Livermore seeks new permit due to hazards

By Glenn Roberts Jr.
STAFF WRITER

LIVERMORE — Lawrence Livermore Laboratory officials plan to expand biological research that would enable scientists to study a wider array of potentially deadly microorganisms.

Some of the planned work would require heightened protection measures to guard against the release of airborne disease-causing strains.

"We need more space, and we need to take some of our work to a higher biosafety level," said Susan Houghton, a lab spokeswoman.

But members of nuclear watchdog groups said they are skeptical about the need for new biowork at the weapons lab.

Livermore Lab scientists in 2000 began working with microorganisms responsible for anthrax and plague, for which the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention requires Biosafety Level 2 safety measures.

In Level 2 labs, scientists work with agents "of moderate risk to personnel and the environment" that might cause treatable diseases of moderate severity.

"We anticipate the need to have both Biosafety Level 2 and Biosafety Level 3 labs," Houghton said.

Level 3 labs are required for work with infectious agents that can cause serious or potentially lethal diseases if inhaled. Airflow restrictions and protective clothing are required in these

Please see **Lab,** NEWS-9

Continued from NEWS-1

labs. In some cases, respirators must be worn by scientists in Level 3 labs.

A Level 3 facility at Livermore "would allow our scientists to conduct more sophisticated experiments on a wider array of microorganisms, which will not only help us further develop much needed bio-detection capabilities but also learn more about new emerging diseases," according to a lab statement released this week.

Houghton said that after a barrage of terrorist attacks against the United States in September, there is a need to step-up biological research.

"Time is of the essence in detection. So we would like to be able to meet this national need as soon as possible," she said, adding that the goal is to have the biolabs in place within a year.

Lab researchers already have participated in efforts to identify genetic "fingerprints" in microorganisms that can be helpful in designing chemical processes to quickly detect the DNA of specific disease-causing strains.

Houghton said that lab researchers could use a Level 3 lab to assist in preparing tests for DNA-detection technologies.

At Los Alamos Laboratory in New Mexico, a sister lab to Livermore, officials have already begun the application process for a Level 3 facility.

Livermore and Los Alamos are nuclear weapons research labs managed by the University of California for the Energy Department.

Al Stotts, a spokesman for the Energy Department regional office in New Mexico, said that public comments have been collected on an environmental assessment prepared for the Level 3proposal at Los Alamos.

He said it could be "a matter of weeks" before a decision is made on whether previous studies are sufficient or whether more environmental reviews are required before the level-three lab at Los Alamos can be approved.

The University of California system has about 40 Level 3 biolabs among its campuses, including UC Berkeley. And there are hundreds more at other sites in the state and across the country.

Marylia Kelley, executive director for the Livermore-based nuclear watchdog group Tri-Valley Communities Against a Radioactive Environment, said that she supports lab efforts to develop technologies that can detect potentially deadly pathogens.

But she also said she questions the safety of handling such disease-causing bioagents at a lab surrounded by highly populated areas.

"I think that there is going to be a lot of concern in this community if they plan to work with these dangerous human pathogens," Kelley said.

She cited past problems with accidental radiation releases from Livermore Lab. "If the laboratory hasn't been able to contain that, then what makes them so sure that they will be able to contain these human pathogens," she said.

Greg Mello, executive director for the nuclear watchdog Los Alamos Study Group, said that safety worries "are certainly very real" with both the Los Alamos and Livermore proposals for Level 3 biolabs.

And there is another worry, he said. "It's a serious problem to create any kind of bioweapons laboratory — even if it's supposed to be for defense — at a nuclear weapons laboratory."

There will always be speculation, he said, that the defense research could double as biowarfare research.

He added, "We already have laboratories that can do this — it's really nothing more than everyone getting on the 'gravy train.' "

Livermore Lab has already begun conceptual designs for the Level 3 proposal, after which a formal process under the National Environmental Policy Act could begin.

Tentative plans are to redesign an existing biolab or add a modular building of about 1,000 square feet. That would be sufficient space for three labs, one or two of which would be Level 3 labs, Houghton said.

Officials at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are "aware of our plans and supportive," she added.

Our organizing, demonstration, large banner, legislative language, and lobbying - and media work - were a part of this effort. We did not lead the lobbying, but followed the lead of disaffected/radical employees.

Aragon Seeks Legislative Oversight of LANL

Journal Staff Report 2/7/02

Sen. Manny Aragon, D-Albuquerque, has put a proposal before the Legislature calling for establishment of a legislative committee to provide oversight of Los Alamos National Laboratory.

Under Aragon's Senate Joint Memorial 84, the proposed New Mexico legislative committee on LANL would meet regularly with a committee of the California state Senate that has oversight of U.S. Department of Energy laboratories operated by the University of California. The university runs LANL.

Also, the New Mexico legislative committee would be charged with appointing a "citizens advisory committee" on oversight of the Los Alamos lab.

Elaine Cimino of La Cienega Citizens for Environmental Safeguards asked for a LANL citizens committee during a hearing before state legislators last week. "The issues are simply too many and too complex to resolve with a public hearing every year or so," Cimino said.

Aragon's proposal says Los Alamos lab has an impact on the air and water quality, employment and economy of surrounding communities and that there should be a legislative committee "to formalize the New Mexico Legislature's commitment to communication with California regarding oversight of Los Alamos National Laboratory."

A citizens advisory committee would give New Mexicans "a voice in recommending the course of action that New Mexico legislators should take in oversight and examination of the activities and consequences of the activities" of LANL, Aragon's proposal says.

The proposal has not been referred to any Senate committees and has been tabled, according to legislative records.

Memorial On LANL Panel Lies Dormant

Citizens Would Have Voice In Legislative Oversight

By Jennifer McKee 2/14/02
Journal Staff Writer

Tucked between bills about health insurance for the poor and tax breaks for New Mexico's centenarians, the fate of a memorial to create a legislative committee overseeing Los Alamos National Laboratory remained undecided late Wednesday night.

The memorial, Senate Joint Memorial 84, introduced by Sen. Manny Aragon, D-Albuquerque, had not gone to the House floor for a vote at press time. The Legislature adjourns today at noon.

If passed, the memorial would create a New Mexico legislative committee to meet with the California legislative committee that oversees two nuclear weapons labs run by the University of California, including Los Alamos National Laboratory.

The memorial would also create a citizens advisory committee to assist the committee and give New Mexico citizens a voice in how the Legislature oversees the weapons lab.

But the memorial, like all memorials, isn't binding. And even if it does pass, it wouldn't force the Legislature to do anything. Rather, it merely requests that the legislative council set up such a committee. Rep. Debbie Rodella, D-San Juan Pueblo, who is sponsoring the memorial in the House, said she thinks the council will set up the committee.

Either way, said lab spokesman John Gustafson, the lab has a good rapport with the Legislature and hopes to continue it.

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Memorial On Panel Dormant

from **PAGE 1**

"We value our relationship with the Legislature and look forward to continued communication and interactions whether or not an advisory board is created," he said.

The memorial is also supported by lab watchdog and Hispanic advocacy groups. The Hispano Roundtable said not passing the memorial would be an embarrassment for New Mexico.

The Los Alamos Study Group said such a committee is "overdue."

"We think it's really needed," said Greg Mello of the Study Group.

The laboratory is in an unusual situation. Although federally funded, the laboratory has been managed by the University of California since its earliest days. All lab employees, therefore, work for the university, an arm of the California state government.

Sometimes, California law applies to the laboratory. For example, members of the public requesting certain documents from the laboratory submit those requests under the California Public Records Act.

In other cases, New Mexico law applies. It's New Mexico environmental laws, for example, that apply to pollution at Los Alamos lab.

And in other cases, only federal law applies. All nuclear materials housed or disposed of at Los Alamos are under the purview of the federal government, as no state — California, New Mexico or otherwise — has jurisdiction over nuclear materials.

Rodella said it's this unique position that makes a New Mexico legislative committee necessary. California already has such a committee, she said.

Rodella, a part-time lab employee, said she sees "firsthand the improprieties that occur."

Group Says Labs Eying New Nukes

Official: Work Theoretical

2/15/02

By Jennifer McKee
Journal Staff Writer

Scientists at the nation's nuclear weapons labs, including the two in New Mexico, are being formed into teams to conceive new nuclear weapons designs, according to a report by a national environmental group that says it obtained parts of a secret government nuclear weapons policy report.

The Natural Resources Defense Council, headquartered in New York City, released the report Thursday which says scientists at Los Alamos and Sandia national labs have been called upon to consider new nuclear weapons designs.

The report is based on information the council says it gleaned from the secret Nuclear Posture Review, a road map of the nation's nuclear policy the Bush administration completed earlier this year but has not fully released to the public.

BINGAMAN

"I was told we are not. We are not designing or developing new warheads."

SEN. JEFF BINGAMAN, D-N.M.

The head of the National Nuclear Security Administration, a branch of the federal Energy Department which runs the weapons labs, testified about the Nuclear Posture Review at a Senate hearing Thursday in Washington.

John Gordon, administrator of the NNSA, said his agency has formed "small groups" of designers to "explore what might be possible" with new nuclear weapons designs.

"We do this with an appreciation on the restrictions on pursuing new weapons," said Gordon. He added that the work is not looking at any specific military needs and is more theoretical.

Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., serves on the Senate Armed Services Committee and was at Thursday's hearing. Bingaman said he asked Gordon specifically whether the nation was engaged in designing new nuclear warheads.

"I was told we are not," Bingaman said. "We are not designing or developing new warheads."

The Natural Resources Defense Council report said the NNSA "is re-establishing advanced warhead concept design teams at each of the three design laboratories — Los Alamos, Sandia and Lawrence Livermore."

The teams will focus on designing new nuclear weapons to penetrate "hardened and deeply buried targets," and for attacking chemical or biological warfare sites. The teams will also

See **GROUP** *on* **PAGE 2**

Group: Labs Designing New Nukes

from **PAGE 1**

focus on new nuclear weapons designed to be more precise and with "reduced yields," or lesser powerful nuclear weapons than the hydrogen bombs currently in the U.S. nuclear stockpile.

The nation has not formally pursued new nuclear weapons since the early 1990s, when President George Bush Sr. issued a presidential directive against it, according to Chris Paine of the Defense Council.

The design teams are part of a larger U.S. nuclear policy that re-examines the existing nuclear arsenal developed during the Cold War and identifies different potential targets for nuclear weapons. Those new targets could demand new kinds of nuclear weapons, according to the report. But because designing and building new weapons is a long and complicated process, the Bush administration wants to start early with design, the report said.

According to excerpts from Gordon's testimony Thursday, Gordon said he also sees three main areas of change in the nation's existing nuclear capabilities and infrastructure.

Along with the design teams, Gordon said the nation must be able to perform an actual nuclear test, something that has not been done in 10 years. Gordon said he doesn't think the nation actually needs to perform a nuclear test but should be able to if the need ever arises.

He also said the nation needs to "think seriously about a modern pit production facility." Pits are the plutonium-sphered engines of every nuclear weapon. The nation has not manufactured a new pit in more than a decade.

Bingaman said he has read neither the National Resources Defense Council report nor the Nuclear Posture Review. "I think our national policy of not developing nuclear weapons has served us well," he said.

Gordon stressed in his comments that the design team that NNSA has assembled is formed to "help ensure long-term design competence," and is not a pursuit of a specific new nuclear weapon or warhead. He further said that his agency is "focused almost exclusively on maintaining today's stockpile."

Still, the report and Gordon's testimony, alarmed some activists.

"We're very familiar with this agenda," said Paine. "We thought we left it behind 17 years ago."

Paine said the information his group obtained doesn't paint a complete picture and leaves room for questions.

Greg Mello, of the Los Alamos Study Group in Santa Fe, said including new weapons designs in the Nuclear Posture Review "provides legitimacy" to the effort and may confound U.S. efforts to contain the spread of nuclear weapons elsewhere in the world.

"It will be very difficult to go into an international gathering and say we are ending the arms race when we are planning on making new weapons," he said.

L.A. Monitor 3/1/02

Area G panel discussion

The Pajarito Group of the Sierra Club will hold a discussion about Area G at 7 p.m. Wednesday in the upstairs meeting rooms at Mesa Public Library.

Los Alamos Study Group asked the Pajarito Group of the Sierra Club to endorse a petition to close Area G (the nuclear hot dump) at Los Alamos National Laboratory. Because of the complex issues, both scientific and political, however, the local group decided to schedule a panel that will address the operation and potential closure of Area G. Panel members participating will be Ray Hahn from the lab's Solid Waste Operations; Merlin Wheeler, a retired hydrologist and environmental scientist; Greg Mello from the Los Alamos Study Group; and James Bearzi, Hazardous Waste Bureau, New Mexico Environmental Department.

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Date:-03/05/2002 Edition:-Final Page:-A1

Federal Officials OK Los Alamos Biolab

By Jennifer McKee Journal Northern Bureau

* Research facility to house deadly bacteria

LOS ALAMOS A biological research laboratory one designed to house live, deadly bacteria at Los Alamos National Laboratory got formal approval Monday from federal officials.

The news was greeted with criticism by many local environmental and citizens groups who have long opposed the research facility.

Local officials with the federal agency that oversees Los Alamos lab announced Monday that the proposed lab poses no significant environmental risks and can be built as planned.

Environmental approval of the lab was the last roadblock to building the laboratory, which has been assailed by its critics as dangerous and inappropriate, while hyped by supporters as a necessary tool in the fight against domestic terrorism.

The decision means officials could start designing the lab soon, with money for construction coming by this fall.

At issue is a so-called Biosafety Level Three laboratory, or BSL-3, the National Nuclear Security Administration wants to build at Los Alamos lab. The NNSA is a semiautonomous arm of the Energy Department that runs the nation's nuclear weapons labs.

The agency last spring proposed building a BSL-3 lab at Los Alamos. The facility would be the only such laboratory at any of the nation's nuclear weapons labs and, according to LANL officials, would let scientists there expand their defensive research into biological warfare and other biological threats.

The agency launched an environmental study into the proposed lab last year. Such a study is required by law and examines any possible environmental threats the lab may pose. A first draft of the study was released last fall.

Corey Cruz, head of the NNSA Los Alamos office, issued a formal "Finding of No Significant Impact" on Monday, meaning that based on the environmental study the proposed research facility will have no major environmental effects.

"If you look at the impacts analyzed there, they weren't significant," he said.

Critics, both local and nationally, say the study was not adequate and that environmental problems aren't the only things wrong with the proposed research facility.

For one thing, said Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group, a Santa Fe-based lab watchdog organization, a secret nuclear weapons facility is no place for any kind of biological research, especially

since the line between offensive and defensive biological research is so fuzzy.

Even if the BSL-3 poses no environmental or health risks, he said, there's no way for the public to know exactly what bugs researchers are studying in the lab or why.

Peggy Prince, executive director of Peace Action New Mexico, another watchdog group, said the environmental study wasn't adequate and called for a more in-depth study, even a study of all planned NNSA biological research.

"We also feel that because the lab will be handling live, biological materials, it could be at increased risk of terrorist attack," Prince said.

Cruz said a more in-depth study isn't needed, as this research lab is not necessarily part of any larger NNSA program.

As for the argument that a nuclear weapons lab should not conduct biological research, Cruz said he "understands, from a theoretical standpoint, why they made those comments." But he said Los Alamos lab's broader mission as a place of weapons research doesn't mean biologists at the facility will be studying germs as biological weapons.

"There are no plans to do that kind of work," Cruz said.

Federal Officials Approve LANL Biological Lab

BY JENNIFER MCKEE 3/5/02
Journal Staff Writer

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See **BIOLAB** *on* **PAGE 2**

Biolab At LANL Approved

from **PAGE 1**

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LANL

Area G forum draws a crowd

By ROGER SNODGRASS
lamonitor@lamonitor.com
Monitor Assistant Editor

3/7/02

It was hot and stuffy on the second floor of Mesa Public Library Wednesday night as a hundred people or so filled every chair and spilled into the hallway to hear a debate on Area G.

The meeting hosted by the Pajarito Chapter of the Sierra Club was supposed to provide direction for the local environmental organization's stance on the state's cleanup politics at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

Greg Mello, director of the Los Alamos Study Group, using a fusillade of overhead projections, argued that the laboratory continued to store too much of the wrong kind of waste in Area G without a proper permit. Despite objections, he said, the lab is making plans to expand its waste production and waste storage under risky conditions and dubious assumptions into the distant future.

Lee McAtee, acting director of the division of environment, safety and health at the laboratory said LANL supports the public dialogue on such issues of mutual interest. He noted that the Pajarito Chapter's call for the meeting had appropriately emphasized the complex technical and political issues involved in the current debate, as well as the complex regulatory issues at stake.

Representing the complex regulatory issues was James Bearzi of the New Mexico Environment Department's Hazardous Waste Bureau.

Bearzi acknowledged the issues are "exceedingly complex," but described his role as a balancing act between difficult alternatives.

"It's more than symbolic that I'm standing here between these two fine gentlemen this evening," he said, with McAtee on one side and Mello on the other.

"We cannot be so cavalier as to say, 'Stop now,'" he said, not-

Please see **AREA G**, *3*

AREA G Forum draws a crowd

From Page 1

ing that it was his bureau's role "to tell the regulatory community what to do if they're wrong and tell them to fix it," as well as to listen to what the public has to say.

Bearzi assured the audience that whatever the outcome, when the environment department arrives at a draft permit statement for Technical Area 54, in which Area G is located, that "there will be many opportunities for the public to weigh in."

The study group found backing for its claims last year, when the New Mexico Attorney General's office wrote to Bearzi in July pointing out legal discrepancies in the department's handling of several material disposal areas (MDAs), which were required to close after the withdrawal of permit requests and the loss of interim status dating back to 1985.

The group has pressed its claims by organizing a "campaign" which gathered petitions, raised money, and delivered to the governor's office some 2,000 food cans relabeled to look like miniature hazardous waste containers.

Another panelist, Merlin Wheeler, a retired hydrologist who once worked at Area G, urged the Pajarito Chapter to stick to the facts of the matter, and not to fall prey to a strategy he perceived in the study group's literature of using the question of Area G as a weapon to fight against the existence of the laboratory.

"Is that a good place or not?" he asked, refocusing the debate on what he considered the essential issue to be decided by facts and not be negative.

After opening statements, the panel took questions from a fairly polarized audience.

A number of questions appeared to be more like statements, as was the case of a man from Santa Fe who read from a book by Lewis Mumford on the "coma" state of contemporary society.

Another man wanted to know if Area G was sufficiently shielded from "particle beams" or "photon cannon hits," or the lab's own "linear beam weapon."

"No," answered McAtee. "There are no shields of the aboveground storage from photon beams."

Susan Dayton, a woman from Albuquerque, read a letter condemning the Pajarito Chapter for its divergence from the rest of the Sierra Club in supporting the laboratory's proposal for building a new laboratory for research on biological agents, before asking McAtee how the lab could be reducing waste if it was going to be producing plutonium pits.

McAtee distinguished between current practices that have reduced waste products across the laboratory, from the old wastes and the old ways of handling them.

"What is safe and what is safe enough?" he asked. "Yes, there are contaminants [from legacy wastes]. They are miniscule and trivial. That doesn't make it right. From the perspective of environmental stewardship, it concerns me that the lab creates any waste at all."

Mello pointed out that risk is not merely a quantitative value to be measured in millirems per day of radiation exposure, but also has a qualitative aspect. A voluntary risk willingly accepted by a person is not the same as "involuntary risks that are imposed upon us by others," he said.

As a warm-up for a lively controversy that is likely to grow throughout the year, the Pajarito Chapter's forum, if nothing else, proved that the public is intensely interested and the topic will draw a crowd.

Closure of LANL Nuke Dump Debated

Activists Demand Cleanup of Area

BY JENNIFER MCKEE
Journal Staff Writer

LOS ALAMOS — Frustration fomented at a forum here Monday night for discussion of the possible closure of Los Alamos National Laboratory's nuclear waste dump.

Activists carrying "Downstream Screamers" signs packed the small room at the Mesa Public Library, matched in number only by a large contingent of Los Alamos lab scientists and state officials. The audience watched representatives of the lab, the state Environment Department and a Santa Fe activist group discuss the legal and environmental implications of closing the 45-year-old dump known by its lab designation as Technical Area 54, Area G.

The Los Alamos Study Group believes that the dump, currently the lab's only low-level nuclear waste disposal area, is violating the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, a 1976 law governing the disposal of hazardous waste. Greg Mello of the Study Group said that shortly after that law passed, the lab, which had been dumping a variety of wastes at the site, including hazardous chemical waste, applied for a permit from the state to continue dumping hazardous waste there.

That request, however, was only an interim measure. Before the lab was ever granted long-term permission to operate Area G as a hazardous waste dump, lab officials decided to take the waste elsewhere and withdraw their permit application. Since then, Los Alamos lab has only disposed of nuclear waste at the site, which is not governed by state law.

No matter, Mello said, the mere fact that the lab did apply for a permit and operated on an interim permit as a hazardous waste dump means that the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act was enacted. The act stipulates that once a permitted hazardous waste site closes, it must be cleaned up.

That never happened in this case.

The state Attorney General's Office has made the same argument, although the office has not pushed to close the site. But it has alerted the Environment Department about the situation.

To that effect, James Bearzi, head of the department's Hazardous Waste Bureau, was also at the forum. Bearzi said the Environment Department will deal with the situation when it issues a different permit to the lab this spring.

Bearzi said he wasn't sure exactly how the department would handle the problem. He said after the meeting, however, that the NMED is working closely with the Attorney General's Office, and the two departments were not in disagreement on what should be done about the dump.

A toxic legacy

More than a decade and $700 million into LANL's current cleanup program, plenty of work remains to be done

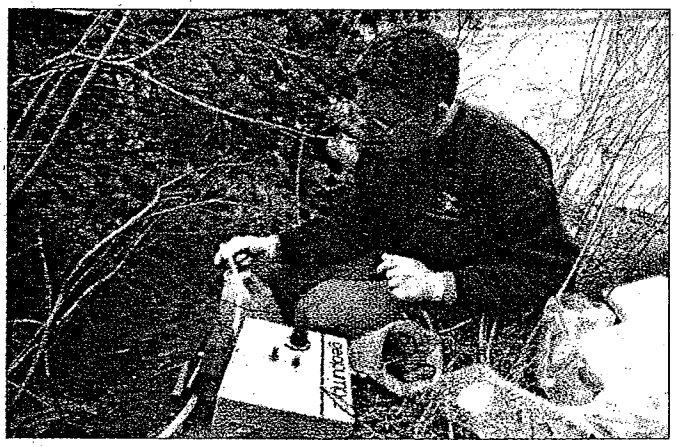
Signs lining the fence along DP Road near Technical Area 21 in Los Alamos warn of buried radioactive waste. Los Alamos National Laboratory has 839 sites where the question of contamination must be addressed.

3/10/02 Story by Jeff Tollefson ❖ Photos by Julie Graber ❖ The New Mexican

LOS ALAMOS — Like many people here, Randy Smith works across the street from a radioactive-waste dump.

Not the new kind, requiring hundreds of millions of dollars in environmental safeguards, decades of study and political capital extending all the way to the Oval Office. It's just an old-fashioned pit, where some of mankind's worst waste was bulldozed over with dirt, topped with a blanket of asphalt in places and surrounded by a barbed-wire fence.

"It's kind of strange when you park your car 20 feet away from a radioactive dump site," Smith says, "but we've never had any problems. You see people out there testing, and you just have to trust that if there were a problem, it would get handled properly."



Steve Yanicak of the New Mexico Environment Department takes water from a spring near the Rio Grande to test for contaminants.

Welcome to Los Alamos, birthplace of the atom bomb. Nuclear-weapons research and fabrication is a messy process: Everything from the usual industrial solvents and chemicals to standard explosives and radioactive materials has left its mark at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

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Inside

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Twelve years and $700 million into its current environmental-restoration program, the lab has 839 sites where the question of contamination needs to be addressed. To date, the lab has gone about environmental cleanup largely on its own, working with and occasionally prodded by the New Mexico Environment Department.

But things are about to change. State regulators are putting the final touches on an order that could, among other things, lay the foundation — and set a schedule — for cleanup throughout the 43-square-mile laboratory.

That plan already faces challenges. The lab's cleanup funding has dropped by more than 50 percent in the last decade. Even at current funding levels, lab officials say, the lab will not be able to meet the state's expectations in the upcoming order, and DOE headquarters is proposing to cut the cleanup budget by another 37 percent next year. Using those figures, the lab would only be able to complete about half the work.

"If they don't meet the terms of the order, then they are in noncompliance, and we will take enforcement action against them," says Greg Lewis, director of the Water and Waste Management Division at the Environment Department.

This path leads into a legal morass that is not to be taken lightly. Ultimately, however, the state can assess $25,000 in fines each day for each violation until the lab comes into compliance. So says the law, anyway.

Regardless of how that scenario might play out, such a legally binding order should significantly increase the state's leverage. If the lab is bound by law to clean up its mess, Lewis explains, DOE will be much more likely to request proper funding to complete the job. For reasons not entirely clear, New Mexico has never taken this step, although other states with DOE facilities have.

"I think there's plenty of blame to go around," Lewis says. "We haven't been as aggressive as we should have been historically, and the lab has certainly been reluctant to be regulated."

The department expects to release the document for public comment this spring.

Cleanup hazards

Notice: Underground Radioactive Material

So read signs on a fence across the street from Randy Smith's hardware store, Los Alamos Home Improvement. DP Road ultimately leads to Technical Area 21, a now-defunct facility that processed plutonium after World War II. Over the years, the area developed into a commercial corridor.

Not all that long ago, the fence wasn't there. Weeds grow from cracks in asphalt once used as a parking lot. Below: plutonium — like that specially packaged and sent to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in Carlsbad today — and who knows what kind of gunk.

Lab officials hesitate when talking about cleanup. They don't know exactly what lies within this quarter-mile-long waste pit, innocuously dubbed Material Disposal Area B, running along the south side of DP Road. When testing, rather than tapping into the middle, the lab monitors below and around the pit for fear of disturbing the waste.

To dig it up would be no small feat. Estimated cost: $1 billion for excavation of this and a few other pits at TA 21. Compare that to what the state spends every year from its general fund, for all functions from schools to prisons to public safety: $4 billion.

The health threats are very real. Depending on the kind and amount of exposure, radiation can cause everything from birth defects and genetic damage to cancer. Chemicals like PCBs are also suspected carcinogens. But, at least in this case, officials

know where the waste is.

Removal would involve potential exposure to workers, not to mention the disruption of business along DP Road, according to Julie Canepa, who heads the lab's Environmental Restoration Project. Once you get it out of the ground, the waste would need to be repackaged and put back into the ground, presumably in a better-designed facility.

"Where I think this is headed is, we are probably not going to be digging it up," Canepa says. "But then we have the long-term stewardship components as an institution."

In other words, if you don't dig it up, how do you monitor for potential health hazards in the future? How do you ensure the contamination will stay put? Nature has a way of dispersing things.

The same question will arise again and again as the laboratory looks at this and other waste-disposal areas. Twenty-six are on the current list, and more low-level radioactive waste is going into the ground at Area G each year.

Questions remain about the state's role in regulating this disposal, as evidenced by the New Mexico attorney general's position that Area G has never been properly permitted and is thus out of compliance. State regulators plan to address that and other operations in an operating permit later this summer.

Even the current disposal sites will go through the formal cleanup process, which includes investigation and possible remediation or further stabilization. Currently, the lab is conducting a pilot project at one disposal area to see how the sites can be addressed.

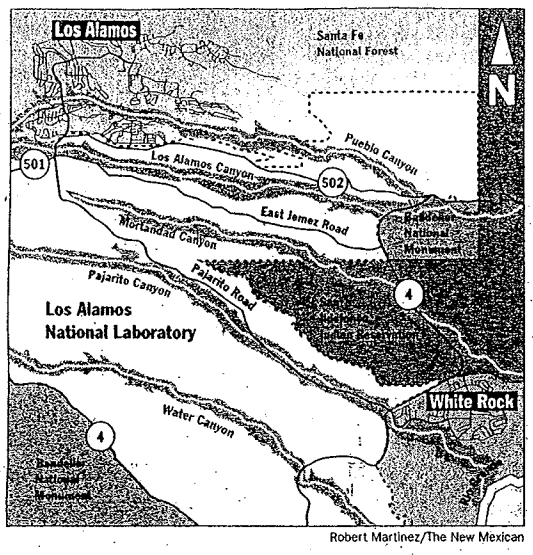
Environmentalists, meanwhile, see it as a simple issue of priorities. Funding for the lab's overall operations has doubled since the Cold War, which indicates the money is there, says Greg Mello, who heads the Los Alamos Study Group, a local environmental and disarmament organization.

If it were a choice between education or poverty-relief programs and digging up pits like the one along DP Road, Mello says, he would choose social programs. But it's not: DOE spends billions of dollars on bombs, Mello notes. "We have the money. I say dig it up."

Identifying the problem

A review that involved the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in the early 1990s turned up more than 2,124 "potential release sites." One by one, the lab's Canepa says, the laboratory has been investigating each. More than 500 sites were removed from the list; still others were consolidated.

Although Mello and others fear the laboratory is conducting a cleanup on paper only, Canepa says many of those sites showed little or no contamination. The laboratory and state regulators have identified about two dozen sites that will require major investigations and cleanup.



Robert Martinez/The New Mexican

The state Environment Department has cited all the waste dumps as a primary concern. Although the federal government has sole jurisdiction over radioactive waste, the dumps also contain a host of solvents, heavy metals and other materials that are governed by the state, which enforces federal hazardous-waste laws.

The waste dumps are on the top of bluffs that overlook myriad canyons at the base of the Jemez Mountains. But this is only part of the picture of contamination. Over the years, the laboratory has dumped contaminated sludges, liquids and solids directly into the canyons below.

Much, though certainly not all, of the contamination took place before the passage of modern environmental legislation in the 1970s. Since then, state officials say, it has taken awhile for the law to catch up to the laboratory. In other words, until laws were passed, the lab often was not doing anything illegal.

Such was the case at Acid Canyon, the site of the first pipe outfall for plutonium-processing facilities during the Manhattan Project. The land is now a public park. At least three cleanup operations have taken place there. The most recent was completed last year at the behest of state regulators who found numerous "hot spots" of plutonium contamination.

The laboratory is conducting a lengthy process to characterize contamination in each of the canyons that traverse the area, beginning with Los Alamos and Pueblo canyons on the east side. So far, the lab has discovered nothing that would warrant immediate action, according to Mat Johansen, who oversees the lab's groundwater program for DOE.

Natural percolation

The problem has become more complex in recent years: Perchlorate and tritium, a radioactive byproduct of nuclear work, turned up in a drinking-water well that taps deep groundwater in Pueblo Canyon. Before these and similar findings, the laboratory had argued that monitoring the regional aquifer was unnecessary because the geology would prevent contamination from percolating deep into the earth, according to the Environment Department's Lewis.

"That was the official stance until very recently," Lewis says.

The Environment Department and the lab are now looking into possible perchlorate contamination in springs along the Rio Grande below White Rock. Lewis joined other department and lab officials on a recent trip to sample the springs, which the state believes are fed by deep groundwater below the lab. Earlier tests turned up positive for perchlorate, although the lab questions the results.

Working with the state, the laboratory is now drilling wells into the deep aquifer to better understand groundwater movement in the area. Both state and federal officials say the program is necessary to understand both current and future dispersal of contaminants.

Here again, the lab comes under criticism. Both state officials and activists question the costs. At $1 million — and much more, in some cases — drilling a groundwater-monitoring well at the laboratory can cost several times the industry average, critics contend. They argue the lab is wasting money on over-priced contractors, although lab officials say the wells are expensive because they include the costs of monitoring and sampling.

For activists such as Mello, spending $70 million on the groundwater-monitoring program — more than the Santa Fe Public Schools operating budget — is just another way of delaying real cleanup.

"What's happened is Los Alamos has turned its cleanup program into a research program," Mello says. "Everyone feels like a scientist if they can just get more data, but there's no end to this."

The laboratory is well aware of this kind of mistrust. It cites the Acid Canyon cleanup as an accomplishment, as well as the $1.7 million removal of about 3,400 cubic yards of soil contaminated with PCBs at an old storage site. That waste went into Area G, the current disposal site. Another $25 million went into the recent cleanup of an old landfill in which fist-sized chunks of high explosives were littered among rubble from old buildings and the like. Canepa says the site was so dangerous that the major work was done with a remote-control backhoe.

From Canepa's perspective, environmental remediation is always a slow and expensive process. Just figuring out what kind of waste is present at a particular site requires on-the-ground work and expensive analysis. Then comes the risk analysis, and finally cleanup, but each of those steps involves reams of paperwork going back and forth between the lab and state regulators.

An air of mistrust

Then again, it can be difficult to view the laboratory as an agency beleaguered by unfair criticism. Only five years ago, for example, the laboratory was dumping highly contaminated water without treatment at Technical Area 16. Technicians ran water over pieces of TNT and other explosives as they were ground down and shaped for proper combustion.

The water was pink with TNT. Officials with the state's Oversight Bureau are only half joking when they say they were afraid to wear big boots near the outfall for fear of sparking an explosion.

"Everything was literally red from TNT. Everything was dead. The trees were dead. The vegetation was dead," says Steve Yanicak, who heads the bureau in White Rock. And yet, he adds, the laboratory wasn't even testing the discharge water for high explosives.

"They knew, but weren't doing anything," Yanicak says. "But again, there was no state oversight."

This kind of fact-checking and fieldwork became the duty of the Oversight Bureau, funded by the DOE according to a 1990 agreement.

For their part, lab officials say their discharge permit didn't require testing for high explosives, an admission that the lab was knowingly conta-

minating a canyon because nobody told them not to.

The lab has since built a treatment plant to remove high explosives from the discharge water. But it should be obvious that it would have been much cheaper to stop polluting years ago. Cleanup, as the lab says, is expensive.

As if to illustrate the long-term costs, the lab found traces of high explosives in the deep groundwater after drilling a well at Technical Area 16. Yanicak wasn't surprised, but the well project was so beset with problems that some people have speculated the contamination was introduced into the deep aquifer when the well was drilled.

For Joni Arends, a Santa Fe activist with Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety, the lab tends to use its technical expertise to undermine environmental discussions with citizens. One refreshing exception, she says, is the Community Radiation Monitoring Group, a lab-sponsored citizen group that tracks air emissions at Los Alamos.

But establishing that group required a Clean Air Act lawsuit filed by Concerned Citizens in 1994. The group bypassed the lab's agreement with EPA, reached after the lab was found to be out of compliance at 31 of 33 facilities that emit radionuclides, and argued in federal court the lab was still failing to properly monitor emissions.

Arends says the lab has since come into compliance and now pays for independent scientific review to help the citizens group understand and debate technical issues. She would like to see the lab take this approach on other issues.

"It's an excellent model," Arends says. "Many times, if we don't speak in scientific terms, our concerns are dismissed."

The environment and public health

For the most part, lab officials say threats to public health do not appear imminent. The quality of well water is of concern to both Los Alamos County and San Ildefonso Pueblo, but thanks to its remote location, most of the current problems facing the lab are environmental. With proper cleanup and long-term monitoring, they stress, the public should be safe.

Not everybody shares this view, of course. Practically speaking, radionuclides are forever. It's difficult to plan for that.

Fred Brueggeman is the deputy administrator for Los Alamos County. He has been working on an effort to transfer more laboratory land into county hands for development. First and foremost comes an agreement that the lab will maintain responsibility for contamination found in the future, but just in case, the county is looking at environmental insurance as a second layer of defense against the unexpected.

The current round includes land along DP Road, and many have suggested one day using the buildings at Technical Area 21 as an industrial-development area. Others want to use the waste pit along the south side as a parking lot. The latter possibility, at least, is not even up for consideration at this point, according to the lab's Canepa.

"No one should use that land," she says.

Sitting in his office overlooking Ashley Pond, once at the heart of the Manhattan Project, Brueggeman tells of the time contractors found a few 55-gallon barrels while relocating a sewer line at the high-school football field. As it turned out, they contained nothing dangerous, but you never know in a place like this.

"I work here. I live about two blocks away, where they used to store nuclear materials," he says. "It's not the sites that we know about that I worry about. It's the unknowns."

A toxic legacy

Nuclear: Budget cuts hinder lab cleanup

Julie Graber/The New Mexican

Dynatech, a U.S. Department of Energy subcontractor, drills a well into the deep aquifer as part of the groundwater-monitoring program in Los Alamos Canyon.

A toxic legacy

Bush plan would squeeze cleanup funding

3/10/02

By JEFF TOLLEFSON
The New Mexican

The Bush administration's proposal to reform cleanup of the nation's defense complex would cut the baseline cleanup funding at Los Alamos National Laboratory by 37 percent next year.

This year's cleanup budget of about $47 million — about 2.4 percent of the lab's overall spending — would decrease by about $18 million next year, according to Julie Canepa, who heads the lab's Environmental Restoration Project. That is down from a high of about $120 million in 1992, she said, although the numbers are not entirely comparable because of changes in the program.

"It's ugly," Canepa said. "As disappointing as the budget reduction is, we need to be motivated and understand there is a sense of urgency and look for creative ways of getting our job done."

As will the New Mexico Environment Department's Oversight Bureau, an independent program that has broad public support for its independent review of environmental matters at U.S. Department of Energy facilities. The bureau is funded by DOE, which has proposed cutting the budget to $725,000 — less than half what bureau officials say is needed to maintain a viable program.

The same thing happened last year, but the DOE in Albuquerque scraped up an additional $950,000 to keep funding level, according to George Rael, director of the Environmental Restoration Division. This compares to a budget of more than $3 million in the early 1990s.

Congress will have the final say, but Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham is proposing the creation of an $800 million account that would be allocated competitively to facilities that can secure expedited or alternative cleanup agreements with state regulators. Overall funding for the Environmental Management program would remain the same at $6.7 billion, including the new cleanup account. That means baseline funding would decrease nationwide, as evidenced by the projections for Los Alamos.

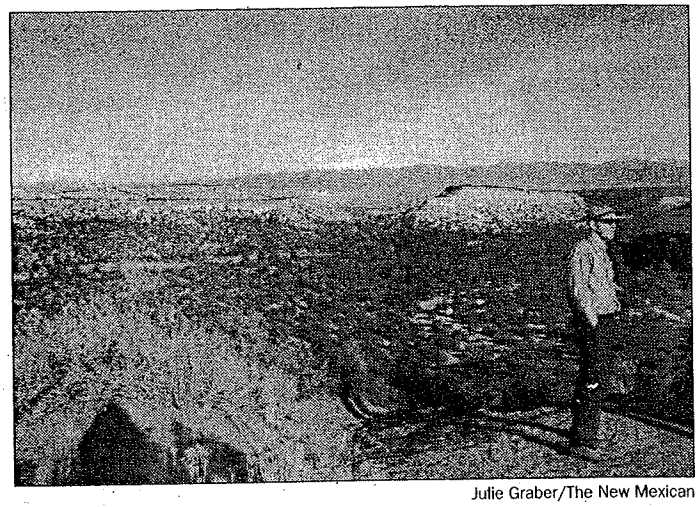
Skeptics say the reform amounts to blackmail, fearing "expedited cleanup agreements" could translate into lower cleanup standards. At the same time, the call for reform is an old one. The DOE has been widely criticized — by environmental groups, politicians, even the DOE's Office of Inspector General — for wasting money on overhead and bureaucracy rather than getting things done. Los Alamos is not free of such criticism.

Citing such inefficiency and a $300 billion cleanup forecast, Abraham last year ordered a "top-to-bottom review" of the program. The result is the current incentive policy.

Canepa says the laboratory has a few proposals that might be able to tap into that account. For instance, the lab might be able to work with the state to break off its current study of contamination in Los Alamos and Pueblo canyons and try to complete on-the-ground cleanup within several years.

The state is open to such ideas. Many believe such an approach could work. If the work gets done more quickly — and properly — why complain?

But opposition to this approach is growing. DOE announced this week the first proposal to tap into the new account. DOE's Hanford site in Washington state would receive $433 billion for a plan to accelerate cleanup by 35 to 40 years. This sounds like a lot of money, but it actually adds up to about the same amount Hanford received this year, since the baseline budget would be significantly cut.



Julie Graber/The New Mexican

The DOE's Mat Johansen shows areas of Pueblo Canyon where groundwater wells have been drilled to test for contaminants.

From a reform standpoint, it looks good: same price, faster cleanup. But groups like the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability in Washington, D.C., are already lining up against it, saying the proposal would require the state of Washington to roll over and allow certain liquid nuclear waste to remain in the underground storage tanks.

"It is a poor way to do environmental planning, and in many states, a violation of the legal obligation to fully fund existing cleanup agreements," said the Alliance's Bob Schaefer, who believes the proposal is a long shot in Congress. "The notion that Congress is going to give DOE a blank check to spend $800 million at the discretion of the secretary ... seems hypothetical."

Most agree it would be more difficult for Los Alamos to tap into the fund, as the lab isn't on line for closure and is still in the investigation phase of most contaminated sites. At the current funding level, the lab's projections extend the cleanup project through 2030. With a budget of $70 million to $80 million annually, the timeline decreases by a decade or more.

She says her current budget is split up this way: 50 percent goes to groundwork, including sampling and characterization efforts, risk assessments and cleanup; another 25 percent goes to processing information about hundreds of sites that do not require groundwork but have not been officially removed from the environmental program; the last 25 percent goes to overhead — lights, phones, salaries and other expenses.

One DOE official, however, said the lab's overhead is actually around 40 to 45 percent, depending on how you count.

Such figures lead some critics to call for real reform, perhaps shifting cleanup from the University of California, which runs the lab, to DOE and a team of contractors. Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group also suggests DOE set aside part of the cleanup funding for the New Mexico Environment Department, which would promote both independent review and public trust in the process.

"I think nationally the states should play a larger role in the cleanup program," he said.

Which brings us to the Oversight Bureau.

"Everybody agrees that the markup in the president's

budget was inadequate," said John Parker, who heads the bureau. Parker is still worried about the general decline in cleanup money, but his once-stinging criticism has softened with the arrival of more money for this year, at least.

"We feel that bodes well for the future," he said.

This is the bureau that found hot spots of plutonium contamination in the publicly accessible Acid Canyon. Lab officials say they would have been caught in future investigations and note the plutonium has since been cleaned up beyond the required risk-assessment levels.

But everyone acknowledges that this kind of independent evaluation is what gives the bureau its value.

"We use them to hopefully show the public we are not lying about our information," said Joe Vozella, who heads the Environmental Management program for DOE in Los Alamos. "They give the public an independent view."

Toxin-containment wall scheduled at Mortandad Canyon

By JEFF TOLLEFSON
The New Mexican 3/10/02

Los Alamos National Laboratory plans to install an experimental barrier made of pecan shells and fish bones, sandwiched between layers of limestone and gravel, to contain contaminants in Mortandad Canyon.

The lab's pilot project rings in at nearly $1 million and could be in place later this summer, years before the planned investigation and any formal cleanup.

But not everybody is happy. One local critic says the lab should take that money and begin a full-scale cleanup.

Roughly 10 yards thick, the underground barrier will sit in a trench that traverses the width of Mortandad Canyon, where the lab's liquid radioactive-waste-treatment plant has discharged wastewater since 1963.

Sediments in the canyon contain industrial chemicals such as perchlorate, nitrates and radioactive materials such as uranium, plutonium, tritium and strontium-90. The latter two are byproducts of nuclear-weapons work. The canyon remains one of the most challenging cleanup projects at the laboratory.

The barrier wall features four layers: a gravel mixture; a fish-bone mixture designed to remove strontium 90; a pecan-shell mixture for nitrates and perchlorate; and a final section of limestone to control acidity. Together, they are designed to remove contaminants from shallow groundwater as it moves down the canyon.

"Most of the top contaminants of concern would be captured," said Mat Johansen, a DOE official who oversees groundwater issues at the lab.

It would not contain tritium, however, nor plutonium, but Johansen notes that plutonium tends to stick to soils rather than move with groundwater.

Lab critic Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group sees this as an expensive way of sidestepping the real solution, which is cleaning up the sediments and possibly treating the water.

"It's research as ritual. As long as it can be sold as cutting-edge science, then it must be good," Mello said.

According to the current schedule, which moves canyon by canyon across the laboratory, the lab will not conduct a formal characterization study of contaminants in Mortandad for at least a couple of years. A follow-up study of possible cleanup alternatives would follow. Last comes cleanup.

If the lab knows Mortandad is a highly contaminated canyon, why wait? That is Mello's question. He says the lab should spend its money to address the most immediate problems first. An underground barrier wall does not remove contamination, address possible runoff flows across the surface or protect deep groundwater.

The lab already has detected low levels of tritium and nitrates — and possibly perchlorate — in the deep groundwater, according to Johansen. These concentrations are below federal drinking-water standards.

He stresses the barrier is just one interim step that can be put in place immediately until the contamination itself can be addressed. Later this month, the lab also plans to install a new system at the treatment plant to reduce perchlorate contamination to about four parts per billion.

Current perchlorate levels often top 250 parts per billion. That far exceeds a proposed health standard of one part per billion recommended in a recent toxicological assessment by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The document indicates the chemical can impair the thyroid gland and cause cancer at higher levels of exposure.

Since there is no official standard for perchlorate, however, the lab hasn't broken any laws with these discharges. From a regulatory standpoint, the lab is getting ahead of the game.

The good news, from the lab's perspective, is the canyon generally does not feature flowing water. It's not an accident the treatment plant at Technical Area 50 was placed here.

Located roughly in the middle of the laboratory, Mortandad Canyon is carved out of a mesa, as opposed to other canyons that collect spring runoff from higher up in the Jemez Mountains. Less water tends to mean less dispersion.

The canyon geology also restricts shallow groundwater flow, which should make it easier to test the effects of the barrier wall, according to Johansen. "It's a good pilot project."

LANL Pay At New High

One-Third of Employees Earning Over $100,000

3/10/02

By Jennifer McKee
Journal Staff Writer

Out of about 7,600 employees now at Los Alamos National Laboratory, 2,365 — nearly one-third — earn more than $100,000.

The number of lab employees earning six-figure salaries has grown about 776 percent in the last seven years. Roughly 270 employees earned wages that high in 1995.

Also, the number of employees earning more than $150,000 rose from 12 in 1995 to 145 today. And for the first time, the salary of LANL director exceeds $300,000. Lab chief John Browne earns $315,700.

The 1995 figures came from Los Alamos lab information posted in the Mesa Public Library in Los Alamos. Salary information for 2002 came from Los Alamos lab.

Some of the bump in $100,000-plus salaries is due to a $5.2 million, one-time increase in pay the lab gave to about 600 computer technicians and those with other "hot skills" two years ago, said Valerie Menke, acting compensation manager for the lab.

The number of employees earning more than $150,000 rose from 12 in 1995 to 145 today. And for the first time, the salary of LANL director exceeds $300,000. Lab chief John Browne earns $315,700.

The one-time raise was meant to entice lab employees to stay on, while computer technicians in the private sector were earning much larger salaries as the information technology economy skyrocketed.

If other wages have spiked, said Art Garcia, division leader for the lab's human resources department, it's because the wages for jobs the lab offers have gone up in similar employment markets across the country.

The lab needs to offer competitive wages, he said, to attract the best people.

But as high as lab salaries may be, compared with the pay of average New Mexicans, Garcia said that public-sector work, even at LANL, cannot compete with private enterprise wages in some cases and the lab sometimes loses people.

LANL pays the market average for its jobs, he said. And Garcia's office has a specific way of determining what those averages are.

The laboratory divides its work force into four sections: scientists, technicians, administrators and administrative help, such as secretaries. In all categories, the lab considers itself a "research and development" institution and looks only at the salaries of other R&D institu-

See LANL on PAGE 7

LANL Pay Reaching New Highs

from **PAGE 1**

tions or companies to come up with market averages.

But how well businesses in this category pay depends on where they're located. For scientists and technicians, who have specialized skills and would be sought after in many parts of the country, the lab looks at research and development wages across the nation, with an emphasis on the West Coast, Garcia said.

For the administrative and administrative assistant jobs, the lab examines pay rates at "regional" research and development companies, those in New Mexico or bordering states.

In New Mexico, Garcia said, LANL compares its pay scale to those of Intel in Rio Rancho and Sandia National Laboratory in Albuquerque.

For all employee categories, Garcia said, the lab conducts similar salary surveys and then pays the average of what other businesses or institutions pay. All wages must be approved by the University of California, which manages the lab, and the federal Department of Energy, which owns and operates the facility.

Laboratory workers are employees of the University of California and a brief glance at wages at other UC-operated labs shows pay at Los Alamos is on par with that of its sister facilities.

Browne, for example, makes exactly the same amount as the director of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Bruce Tarter. The director of the other UC-managed lab, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, earns $310,000.

Los Alamos lab's senior managers make slightly less than those at both Lawrence Livermore and Lawrence Berkeley. Salaries for LANL's eight senior managers range from $220,000 to $260,000, with the highest wage earned by Joe Salgado, the lab's principal deputy director. The average is $236,000. Lawrence Livermore's senior managers — there are 13 of them — earn between $205,000 to $270,000, with an average of $240,000.

In New Mexico, LANL's wages stand far above the average. While wage information is not public for Intel and Sandia National Lab (managed by Lockheed Martin) — the two in-state institutions the lab uses as measuring sticks for its own pay — wage data from the year 2000 gathered by the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that Los Alamos wages are very high for New Mexico.

For example, the average chief executive in New Mexico in 2000, the last year for which figures are available, earned $102,000, less than a third of the lab director's salary.

Administrative managers in areas outside the lab's core science mission also earn high salaries compared to New Mexico averages. The office director of the lab's Quality Improvement Office, a department dedicated to improving relations with the lab's neighbors, workers and overseers, earned more than $164,000 in 2001.

Public relations managers in New Mexico earn on average $53,940. The lab's public relations manager earns more than twice that.

National wage statistics, also compiled by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2000, show Los Alamos wages above some national averages but reflecting the national average in other areas.

General operations managers in the United States earn an average of $70,220. Many LANL operations managers earn more, and in some cases, much more. A natural sciences manager, according to the national statistics, earns on average $78,850. Some Los Alamos employees in that category are paid twice as much.

But LANL's nuclear technicians earn roughly the national average, about $61,000.

Greg Mello, of the Los Alamos Study Group, an anti-nuclear lab watchdog organization, believes Los Alamos lab wages are, on average, better than those for other scientists, both in the private sector and at colleges and universities. He attributes the situation to a variety of factors, including the way the lab is funded through the federal government and what he sees as an excess of overpaid managers and administrators.

"Los Alamos has too many managers," he said. "They have a matrix system designed to diffuse responsibility and make accountability difficult."

Garcia said the lab hires as many people as managers think they need.

He said that the lab cannot hope to pay as much for some jobs as parts of the private sector such as the computer industry, which can lure employees with stock options in lucrative high-tech businesses.

More follow-on from work w/ reporter Tollefson. The "overhead" conversation was in our office...

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Don't cut back on LANL cleanup

Los Alamos National Laboratory estimates that it employs about a third of the workers in our tri-county area, with a $3.8 billion impact on Northern New Mexico. The lab provides about 7,000 jobs, and plans to add another thousand this year.

But some of these jobs come at an environmental cost.

Even in the dark ages of atomic-weapons research, the scientists of Los Alamos had some idea what dangerous stuff they were working with: They were, after all, scrambling to build a bomb the likes of which the world hadn't seen.

But their knowledge of nuclear waste was limited. In too many cases, they treated the byproducts of their research like so much garbage — and that was before the dawn of litter-consciousness. Despite growing awareness of nuclear-waste dangers, the canyons and arroyos of the Pajarito Plateau served for decades as dumping grounds for a witch's brew of radioactive and other dangerous substances.

During the past decade or so, Los Alamos National Laboratory leaders have come to acknowledge the folly of their past, as well as the need for a rational waste-disposal system and the cleanup of the menacing mess they made.

Nuclear-waste reform was important enough when LANL was merely a research institution. Now that weapons work is receiving more emphasis, the ongoing cleanup is even more vital to the lab and its surroundings.

So when the Bush administration proposes *cutting* the cleanup budget by 37 percent, New Mexicans and the rest of the nation should shudder.

Like so many White House acts of scorn for the environment, the spending cuts are being proposed in the name of reform. In this case, Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham has argued that too much of his department's cleanup money is being spent on administration, and not enough at the contaminated sites.

Secretary Abraham might have a point. So might the lab's many critics, peacenik and environmentalist alike. According to Sunday's story in *The New Mexican* by Jeff Tollefson, there's disagreement about "overhead" costs of the lab's Environmental Restoration Project: It's 25 percent, says the project director. Try 40-45 percent, says a Department of Energy insider.

Whatever the percentage, cutbacks aren't the answer; *real* reform is. Too much paperwork, too few backhoes and trucks digging and hauling away contaminated dirt? Surely DOE has — or can find — the combination of scientific and management expertise for safer, more efficient cleanup. If digging up some sites would just spread the nuclear contamination, lab officials should consider stabilizing the waste in place. And if the job can be done quicker and cheaper, then target dates should be moved up.

Sens. Jeff Bingaman and Pete Domenici and Rep. Tom Udall should be strong voices in Congress in favor of cleaning up nuclear waste in Northern New Mexico — and making sure no new messes are made.

As our region's single biggest employer, the Department of Energy must make sure those employees and the neighboring countryside are as safe as possible from some of the more dangerous products of its work.

LANL Using Fish Bones, Pecan Shells To Clean Canyon

3/12/02 Journal

The Associated Press

LOS ALAMOS — Pecan shells and fish bones are part of an experiment by Los Alamos National Laboratory to contain contaminants in Mortandad Canyon.

The cost of the pilot project is estimated at about $1 million.

The wall would consist of four layers — gravel, a fish-bone mixture to remove strontium 90, a pecan-shell mixture for nitrates and perchlorate, and limestone to control acidity, officials said.

Together, they are designed to remove contaminants from shallow ground water as it moves down the canyon.

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"It's a good pilot project," Johansen said.

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MAT JOHANSEN, DOE OFFICIAL WHO OVERSEES GROUND WATER ISSUES AT THE LAB

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The underground barrier is to sit in a trench that crosses the width of Mortandad Canyon, where the lab's radioactive-waste treatment plant has discharged water since 1963. The canyon is near the middle of lab property.

According to the current schedule, which moves canyon by canyon across the laboratory, the lab will not conduct a formal characterization study of contaminants in Mortandad for at least a couple of years.

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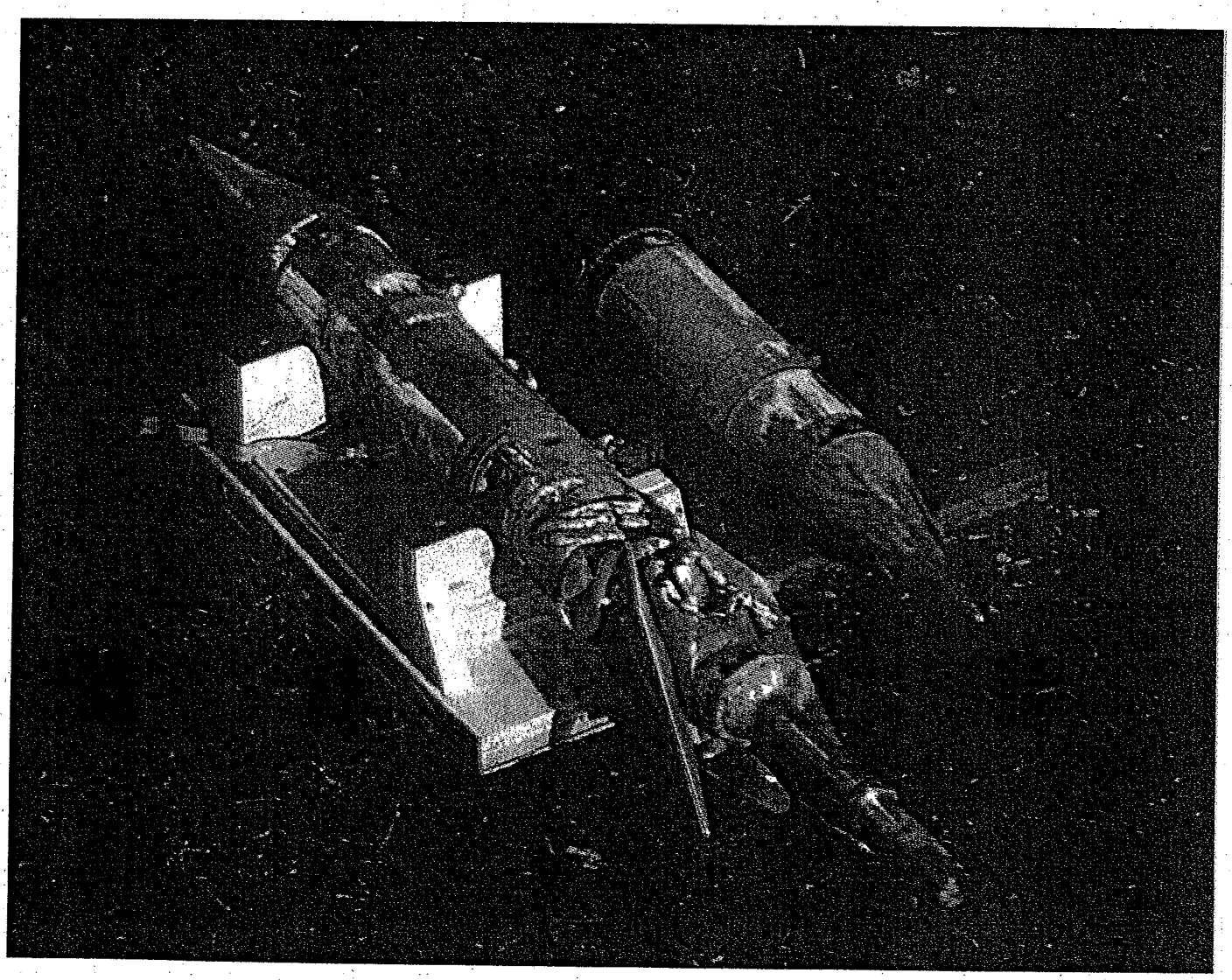
INSIGHT & OPINION

Analysis, commentary and ideas

EDITOR: JACK EHN, 823-3616, jehn@abqtrib.com. **DEPUTY EDITOR:** LAWRENCE

BACK TO THE NUCLEAR FUTURE



Mark Farmer/Associated Press

President Bush's recently completed "Nuclear Posture Review" strategy seeks the capability for new, earth-penetrating, bunker-busting warheads, capable of far deeper penetrations than these two test U.S. B61-11 penetrating warheads. Loaded with depleted uranium, they were readied for return to Sandia National Laboratories in Albuquerque for analysis after a March 1998 test at the Fort Wainright bombing range near Fairbanks, Alaska. They were dropped from a B-2A Stealth bomber and penetrated the permafrost to depths of 6 to 10 feet.

The more things change in the post-Cold War world, today's author warns, the more the nation's nuclear arsenal and two of its creators, New Mexico's nuclear weapons laboratories, stay the same – bucking the global trend toward denuclearization

By Greg Mello

On Dec. 31, the Bush administration delivered to Congress its nuclear weapons strategy, "Nuclear Posture Review."

On Jan. 9, the press was briefed.

In keeping with nuclear tradition, few details were provided; the briefing was confined to broad ideas and opaque terminology.

Fortunately, by mid-February, the first details of the actual plan began to leak, first to the Natural Resources Defense Council and later to major newspapers.

The devil, as it turned out, is in the details for U.S. nuclear policy and for nuclear weapons facilities such as New Mexico's Sandia and Los Alamos national laboratories.

What an active fellow that devil turns out to be!

The Bush nuclear strategy was pitched — and largely reported — as "new thinking" that would allow the United States to reduce its nuclear stockpile from about 10,650 warheads and bombs today to between 1,700 and 2,200 in 10 years.

But the Bush plan doesn't actually involve real stockpile reductions. Despite the headlines, total U.S. warheads are to be reduced by 6 percent over 10 years, or fewer than 1 percent per year.

This is because only one warhead type would be actually dismantled — the decades-old W62 warhead currently mounted on Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missiles. Previously slated for elimination, they were temporarily reprieved when congressional Republicans scuttled ratification of the START II treaty.

Other than the W62, all the "reductions" in the plan are like Enron debts, simply moved to subsidiaries with different names.

Warheads taken from the category of "operational deployment" will be either redesignated the "responsive force," or placed in the "strategic inactive stockpile." There they will mostly remain intact and available for active redeployment at any time, in some cases within weeks, depending on the weapon in question. All these weapons could be redeployed when desired, which is the precise reason they are being kept.

The Enron-style accounting, however, doesn't stop there.

Aside from assembled nuclear weapons, the United States also has in reserve thousands of components, including plutonium "pits," the nuclear cores of weapons. Some 5,000 "strategic reserve" pits, and possibly thousands more, are now stored near Amarillo, Texas, where they are available for ready remanufacture into a number of pretested weapon designs.

The number of nuclear warheads and bombs potentially available under the Bush plan is closer to 15,000 than the "1,700 to 2,200" figure that was pitched to gullible journalists.

The gravest dangers of the Bush nuclear strategy, however, do not lie just in its numerical sleight-of-hand. Rather, they lie in its pursuit of new nuclear capabilities — both weapons and the infrastructure to quickly make them — and in a newly serious, bloody-minded policy that would justify their use in battles around the world.

The Bush team calls its strategy the "New Triad." It integrates nuclear strike forces with missile defenses — both with conventional power projection forces — and supports these with a "revitalized (nuclear) infrastructure that will provide new capabilities in a timely fashion to meet emerging threats."

Put simply, this nuclear strategy aims to integrate nuclear weapons more tightly into the military with a variety of new roles, including and especially nuclear war-fighting. The plan gives specific examples of situations in which nuclear weapons might be used, and sets a new, very low, threshold for considering a nuclear strike.

The plan calls for the development of new kinds of nuclear weapons, such as better earth-penetrating weapons and "agent defeat" weapons designed to incinerate biological and chemical warfare agents. Advanced concept teams to design these and other weapons are to be started at the nuclear weapons laboratories such as Los Alamos and Sandia.

Because some of these new designs will require nuclear testing, "Posture Review" requires the Nevada test site be readied to conduct new nuclear tests (which would violate the 1996 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty) with only a few months' lead time, certainly faster than Congress' response time.

It will not be inconvenient, for those who wish to resume nuclear testing, if other countries, for example China, are provoked to follow our lead. Projecting a need for nuclear weapons and their delivery systems at least 50 years hence, this plan calls for new, expanded and upgraded nuclear weapon production plants to make and maintain nuclear weapons, as one senior Department of Energy official put it, "forever."

All of this in the face of sweeping global efforts to denuclearize the world through nonproliferation, test bans and disarmament treaties.

In the Clinton administration, a cloud of deception lay over the varied purposes of what the DOE calls its "stockpile stewardship" program that allegedly was supposed to only monitor and maintain the existing arsenal.

Most Democrats, eager to placate the labs, couldn't — or wouldn't — see that the expanded capabilities that make that program so expensive were *not* actually needed to maintain existing U.S. nuclear weapons.

In fact, many of those capabilities, quite possibly including nuclear testing, *are* needed to make existing nuclear weapons different or to develop new ones. It is this strategy the Bush team has brought out of the closet for the world to see.

The plan's premise is that to achieve the specificity and speed required for credible nuclear tactical warfare in a Third World setting, an array of ambitious new military capabilities with global reach is needed. Not only must new weapons be tailored and certified for new kinds of targets; better — much better — targeting intelligence will also be required on the ground and in the skies; and very rapid strike planning capability will also be needed to support an evolving nuclear battlefield.

Please see **FUTURE/C3**

TODAY'S BYLINE

Mello is director of the Los Alamos Study Group, a Santa Fe-based nuclear watchdog group that concentrates on Los Alamos National Laboratory.

TAP IN

Leaked portions of the Bush nuclear plan can be seen at: **http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/policy/dod/npr.htm**

To comment, **write to us at** Letters to the editor, The Albuquerque Tribune, P.O. Drawer T, Albuquerque, N.M. 87103. **Our fax number is** 823-3689. **Our e-mail address is** letters@abqtrib.com.

INSIDE: **Editorial:** On the Sandia Labs contract, **Page C2.** **Columns:** Marjorie Bell Chambers on the Middle East, **Page C2;** On

FUTURE *from C1*

But with this level of detailed, on-the-ground intelligence (and hence "presence"), what would be the military "value added" of a nuclear strike — even if you do not consider the catastrophic consequences for global nuclear nonproliferation, U.S. stature at home and abroad, or homeland security?

There are many such hard military questions, all unanswered in this plan.

In fact, the plan appears to reflect more the budgetary needs of the nuclear weapons complex and the political needs of civilian ideologues than any coherent military strategy per se.

Indeed, the plan reads, in many places, as if the senior military officers — who blessed it — have been sold a bill of goods by enthusiastic weapons scientists and colonels who seek to maintain or expand nuclear capabilities, or by political actors who seek a posture of nuclear threat as essential to buttressing their aspirations of empire.

Does the military, and do members of Congress, know that so-called "low-yield" nuclear weapons cannot penetrate the earth more than a certain, relatively small amount, for fundamental physical reasons? Because they depend on physical law, they cannot transcend research, however lucrative the goal?

Do they know that the capability to destroy an enemy underground leadership bunker with a small nuclear weapon, let alone an underground storehouse of biological or chemical weapons, is actually rather limited — whereas the damage to any surrounding population from even a very small nuclear weapon would be extensive, unpredictable, long-lasting and devastating?

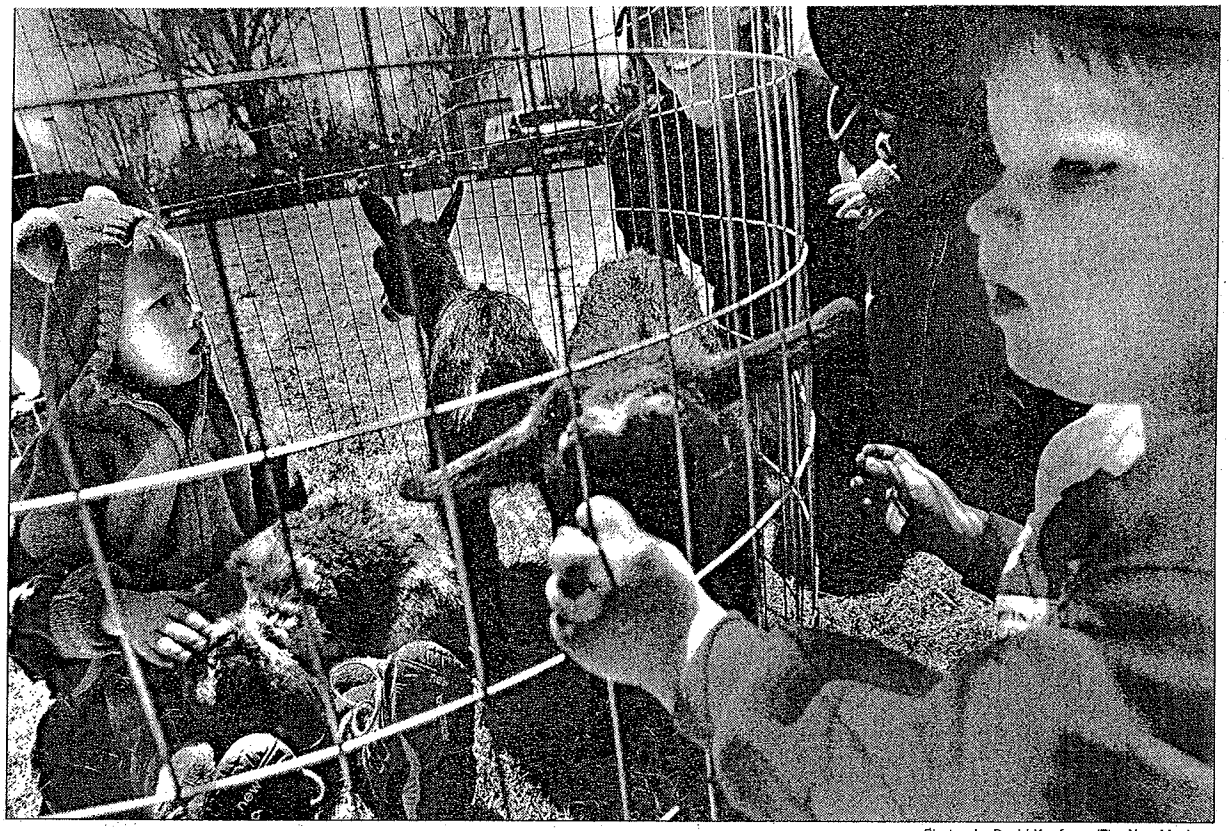
This is a security plan that needs a serious reality check, one that Democratic leaders of Congress such as New Mexico's Sen. Jeff Bingaman could and must provide.

In the late 1940s, our political and military leaders thought their monopoly on nuclear weapons gave them the "winning weapon," in historian Gregg Herken's memorable phrase. This ambition was frustrated by the Soviet Union's success at building its own nuclear weapons and, at terrible cost to its people, catching up — and keeping up — with the United States.

The superpower contest threatened the whole world but might have helped prevent nuclear use by both nations.

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union were a "near-death experience" for many nuclear weapons managers, ideologues and war planners. The devilish details of the Bush strategy, however, offer them salvation, with all the passion of a second chance.

Now lacking another superpower to help restrain them, this time we had all better get prepared to do it ourselves.



Photos by David Kaufman/The New Mexican

Nigerian miniature goats and rabbits enthrall Sasha Hunter, 3, left, and Reis Ruhrwein, 2, during Saturday's Earth Day celebration. The animals were from Story Ranch, a summer camp for children. At center is Amy Hoss.

Even Santa Fe babies take part in

Earth Day

4/21/02

By TOM SHARPE
The New Mexican

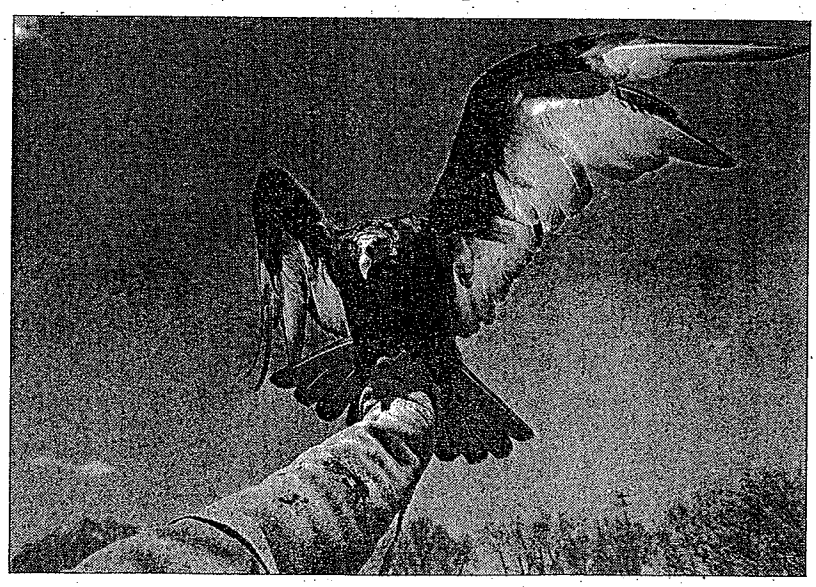
Nicol Pate said she used diapers on her daughter Ame until she was 7 months old. Then, she learned about natural infant hygiene.

"Most of the babies in the rest of the world do it this way," she said. "They don't use diapers in Asia, Africa and places in South America."

"Babies are born with the ability to control their muscles and they signal when they need to go. In America, we really don't know that anymore."

Pate spoke to other young mothers about "diaperless babies" Saturday as she sat on a bale of hay, suckling Ame, in the soccer field next to Fort Marcy Recreation Complex where 200 people listened to live music, flew kites, poured over tables of pamphlets and just hung out to celebrate Earth Day.

Among various groups represented was the Los Alamos Study Group, which promoted a campaign to clean up the Area G nuclear-waste dump at Los Alamos National Laboratory. Elsewhere, Suchi Solomon gave out sapling trees and Robert Larragoite of Habitat for Humanity spoke about housing.



A turkey vulture from The Wildlife Center near Española was a guest at the Earth Day celebration.

Pate explained to her audience a method she says can keep from filling up landfills with disposable diapers and save the water and expense involved in washing cloth diapers.

She said that even infants signal

Please see **EARTH DAY**, Page B-4

EARTH DAY

Continued from Page B-1

when they need to eliminate — some will squirm or fuss, others will get a glazed-over look.

She said when parents become aware of those signals, they can take their babies to a toilet or outdoors where they can hold them face-away and make a "pssss" sound to trigger urination or defecation.

"I don't like to use the term 'potty training' at all," she said, adding that her method stresses compassion.

She said children trained via natural infant hygiene often learn to use toilets earlier than conventionally toilet-trained children.

Pate, a psychotherapist, said she learned the method in La Leche League from Courtney Asprodites.

Asprodites, a former social worker, said she first read about the method in Diaper Free by Ingrid Bauer, then

Nicol Pate said when parents become aware of certain signals, they can take their babies to a toilet or outdoors where they can hold them face-away and make a "pssss" sound to trigger urination or defecation.

learned about it first-hand two years ago when she went to Vietnam to adopt her daughter Chloe.

Ame's father, Derek Hopp, an owner of Kinzoku Metal Works on Second Street, said he wasn't too comfortable with the idea of a diaperless baby when Pate first broached the subject.

"I said, 'Yeah, that sounds interesting for somebody else,'" he said.

"But, at the beginning, I was even better (at the method) than Nicol."

The young couple say they still use diapers when they take Ame out to eat or into social situations where finding a bathroom quickly can be difficult.

Pate is looking for other young parents to call her at 424-8297 if they are interested in forming a support group on natural infant hygiene.

She said the important thing is "being creative in our solutions and trying to remind ourselves about the whole theory behind it, because if you have any stress or irritation about it, it's not going to work. I think really the wisest thing is just having deep mindful attention toward your child."

10 things you can do for the Earth

1. Carry your lunch in reusable containers instead of disposable paper and plastic bags.

2. Turn the water off while you are brushing your teeth. Turn the faucet on halfway when you are ready to rinse. This will save you one to two gallons each time you brush. You can also conserve water by filling a dishpan with sudsy water instead of letting the faucet run as you scrub dishes and pans. Then turn the faucet on halfway to rinse. You can save 10 to 15 gallons of water per load of dishes.

3. Separate your household waste into organic materials, recyclables and garbage. Organic waste can be composted into a great fertilizer for your garden.

4. Use energy-efficient light bulbs. One 18-watt fluorescent bulb provides the light of a 75-watt incandescent bulb and lasts 10 times as long. Substituting just one fluorescent light for a traditional bulb can keep about 250 pounds of carbon out of the atmosphere.

5. Don't buy tropical-wood products without knowing where they came from. There is no sense in tossing out your mahogany furniture, but when it comes time to replace it, think globally and act locally. Chances are, the mahogany table or teak chair you consider buying could have played a role in tropical deforestation. Local woods include oak, pine, cherry, birch or maple.

6. Try to buy items in bulk. Try to buy products that aren't overly packaged. Buy products packaged in recycled materials. Over 50 percent of cardboard supermarket packages are made from recycled paper. Recycled packaging can be identified by the recycling symbol on the package.

7. Reuse wrapping paper, ribbons and bows. Birthday, Halloween, Christmas, Hanukkah, graduations, weddings and other occasions leave behind $300 million worth of trash a year. A lot of this material is not recyclable. Instead of wrapping gifts in store-bought paper, use leftover fabric, lightweight wallpaper or the Sunday comics.

8. Water gardens early in the morning or after the sun has set — and only once a week during Stage 3 water rules in Santa Fe. About one-third of the water that's sprayed overhead during the heat of the day is lost to evaporation before it gets to the plants. Consider installing drip irrigation to make the most of the water you use on your plants.

9. Pick up litter. Animals can swallow or get tangled in our garbage. This can result in injury or even death. Curious animals often stick their heads through plastic six-pack holders.

10. Support organizations that do conservation work. Many of these nonprofit organizations have volunteer programs. If you can't contribute money, give some of your time.

Source: www.nmenvirolaw.org. Adapted for local conditions.

Eldorado Sun May 2002

A Terrifying Tour of the Lab in Los Alamos

by Shannyn Sollitt

On December 15, 2001, Greg Mello and associates of the Los Alamos Study Group took citizens on a tour of Los Alamos National Laboratory. Most know that the Lab, a part of the University of California, is the site for the manufacturing of plutonium pits, the trigger for nuclear weapons. Although 20,000 perfectly good back up nuclear weapons are stored in a bunker in Amarillo, our government feels the need to constantly renew the stockpile of weapons, mainly to be able to recruit scientists. They need some way to test scientific skills — real design, real prototyping, real manufacturing and testing.

$700 million has been spent so far on developing the pit manufacturing facility which currently employs about 1000 people. There will be a lot of nuclear waste as a result — enough, they anticipate, to fill up an entire mesa, Mesita del Buey. Already 11 million cubic feet of chemical and nuclear waste are buried there, along with nuclear reactor cores, in shallow unlined pits and shafts. On top, mildly fire resistant tents house 50,000 drums of transuranic radioactive waste intended for WIPP over the next 30 years. This waste dump has been operating illegally since 1985, with no external oversight. The illegal dump will continue to grow under the Stockpile Stewardship Program — around 9000 cubic meters per year. The trees there have elevated levels of radio-nuclides. Burrowing animals are radioactive. It is ranked as a low priority site for clean up, primarily because there is not enough citizen outrage.

VULNERABLE TO ATTACK

First on the tour, Tech Area 18 is where they test burst reactors for criticality experiments and test the effects of radiation on electronic equipment. About $3 million dollars worth of research is done there. This area is so vulnerable to attack that it costs $32 million to protect it against theft or the radiological sabotage of special nuclear materials, i.e. weapons grade plutonium and enriched uranium. Around 200 tons of these special materials are spread across LANL. All facilities across the entire complex that house special nuclear materials have been tested against a potential terrorist attack (a kind of laser gun tag). Fifty percent of the time, the bad guys win.

Tech Area 55, the Plutonium Processing Plant, is decorated with an orange windsock so that, when the alarm sounds, people know which way to run. The fire of 2000 came to within 100 feet of a light steel building, #185, which contained at that time around 20 kilograms of concentrated plutonium waste — considered a Category One Nuclear Waste Facility. The Department of Energy didn't know it was there. When plutonium burns, it disperses in the smoke and can travel for many miles, depending on the wind, making an eternal wasteland of its path. There are huge safety problems with storage of plutonium, a very unstable material, extremely difficult to store. There are 3 metric tons of weapons grade plutonium stored at TA 55. $19 million was spent on a storage facility there that had such egregious faults, it was turned into an office building. Terrible accidents have happened inside the facility, dosing numbers of workers with plutonium.

QUESTIONS ABOUT BIO-DEFENSE WORK

Next stop, the site of the CMR (Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Building) is the largest building at the Lab, sitting atop a modern earthquake fault. Two Bio-Safety Level 3 labs, (BSL3), will be built on the adjacent parking lot. Level 3 labs handle pathogens contracted through inhalation — classical bio-weapons agents. Proposals to construct these two labs are at the vanguard of a huge bio-defense research funding, anticipated nationally to be in the tens of billions of dollars. It is not clear what research will be done in these two proposed facilities, and there is no way to tell if this type of research is offensive or defensive — until it is in a warhead. Particularly worrisome is the tinkering with the genetic engineering of pathogens.

Edward Hammond (the Sunshine Project) enlightened the citizens about the six years of negotiation at the UN Biological Weapons Convention. The US completely shut down the United Nations Organization for the Prohibition of Biological Warfare and nixed the Verification Agreement which would allow UN oversight and regular inspections. The US refusal to participate rendered the Verification Agreement null and void. The Labs were the main opponents of the Agreement. DOE facilities are not transparent.

When the US backed out of the Anti Ballistic Missile Treaty, the international community became even more suspicious of the US. For the past years it has become apparent to them that the US has been blatantly lying about its bio-defense work. Every other country would open their facilities. It is known that bio-bombs have

been tested "out west" in a secret aerosol facility. In Sverdlovsk, Russia, less than 2 grams of anthrax escaped through the filters at an aerosol testing facility and killed 1000 people. A small mistake can be very serious to adjacent populations, not to mention what bio-warfare might look like. A Bill awaiting consideration in the Senate, H.R. 3160, eliminates from the Freedom of Information Act the right for research organizations, citizen's groups, and others, to know what is happening in these facilities.

BUT WHO CAN MAKE IT WORK?

Just around the corner, the "Cathedral of Computing," the world's largest computer, will be able to compute 1000 trillion numerical operations per second. It has six cooling towers and consumes, at peak capacity, power which equals 1/3 the power of Los Alamos County — including the entire Lab. Primarily, its purpose is to simulate nuclear explosions. The weapons designers, however, doubt that the calculations of the computer programmers could be even remotely reliable. Among the other work they expect to use it for is bio organism modification, synthesis of new life forms, as well as other jobs like keeping track of all the bank accounts in the world. Based on the past track record with other super computers at LANL, when the final installation is complete, it is likely that no one will be able to figure out how to make the thing work — with a $200 million price tag.

Last, but far from least, on top of a mesa amid ancient pueblo dwellings is Tech Area 53. Los Alamos Neutron Science Center is where the high current proton accelerator can be used to make isotopes. It is poised for the largest project proposal in the history of the Lab: the development of the Advanced Hydrotest Facility, (AHF), with an initial capital cost of $1.6 billion. This is the weapon designer's dream. They expect to be able to simulate the closest approximation of a real nuclear explosion, save actual testing of the weapon. It will send a beam of protons across the mesas from an underground explosion chamber 350 feet below the top of the mesa. It has a high-speed x-ray machine for plutonium pit implosion photography. The program is so large it could consume 3/4 of the existing plutonium processing capabilities of the Lab. They can't manufacture a pit if it can't be tested. This is a very high priority project. This huge program can go forward, Greg Mello believes, because the citizens aren't informed by the press. The Energy and Water Appropriations Committee, headed up by New Mexico Senator Domenici, appropriates the funding. There is no Congressional oversight. According to Washington insiders, the appropriation committee members are dazzled by technology without a real idea what the bomb complex is about.

A DOZEN PEOPLE DECIDE

Seventy-nine percent of the Laboratory activity is nuclear weapons and associated waste. Only a dozen people make the decisions as to the directives of the Lab. It is difficult to begin to know what to do about this situation which has been progressively worsening for decades. Are the appropriations really in the name of National Security or something altogether different? Greg Mello queries whether it is in our best security interests to create more reasons for the international community to fear the actions of the United States. Wouldn't it be better to remove the desire of others to inflict casualties on US citizens by working to correct the massive social injustice at the root of this desire — stemming from the imbalance of the utilization of world resources? Can the small group of thoughtful, committed citizens *really* change the world, (as Margaret Mead has said), or does the group need to be a whole lot bigger?

CALL TO ACTION

If this article disturbs you, contact the Los Alamos Study Group at 982-7747 for more information about how you can help.

O

An Eerie Voice From the Past

In the film archives of the Library of Congress there exists what might be the only remaining copy of a film entitled *Where Will You Hide?*, released by Encyclopedia Britannica Films in 1948. The script is like a voice from behind the curtain, eerily delivering the unfolding scenario of the Nuclear Age.

It opens:

"The long Shadow of World War III, the first war of the atomic age, creeps steadily forward... Civilization stands in mortal danger! The cool methodical searching by scientists has given us an ever-growing control of the physical world, has provided each of us with a thousand mechanical slaves. Yet through all the years of opportunity we have not learned how to get along with our neighbors, man with man, or nation with nation... [and still] seek justice through slaughter and expect good to emerge from the reeking evil of war."

The film accurately lays out the advancements of weapons technologies which have since been developed — the self guiding rockets; the bacteria and germ warfare; the biological poisons which could kill every human on the North American Continent; the atomic bombs one thousand times more destructive than the ones used against Japan. It even predicts the effort to stop saboteurs.

"We could search all planes and trains and boats and automobiles crossing our borders. We could open every single package... We could remain on a constant, twenty-four hour, day-in day-out alert under some kind of dictatorship."

"We could devote all of our scientific effort to the constant improvement of weapons at the sacrifice of most constructive scientific programs. We could restrict ourselves to a standard of living under which everything but the barest essentials of existence would be sacrificed to a futile defense against the inevitable. Such a defense means a totalitarian America! A regimented population! A militarized industry!" — *S.S.*

LANL Told To Study Pollution

Critics Say State Directive Doesn't Call for Cleanup

By Jennifer McKee 5/2/02
Journal Staff Writer

The New Mexico Environment Department intends to issue an order requiring Los Alamos National Laboratory to take measures to deal with "imminent and substantial endangerment" to people and the environment from waste materials at the lab.

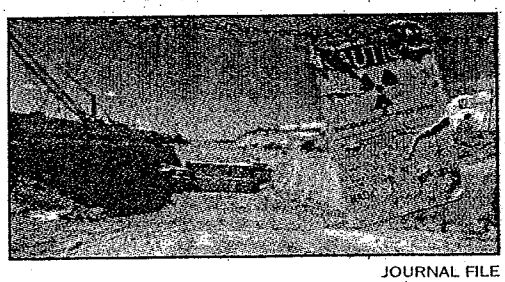
The order, to be issued under the New Mexico Hazardous Waste Act, will be released in a draft form today and relates to hazardous waste the lab has stored or dumped in its almost 60-year history. The public will have 60 days to comment before a final order is issued.

While the draft order has not officially been made public, an Environment Department "fact sheet" on the order mailed out this week describes a huge program in which the lab would be required to investigate pollution in ground water, soil and streams. The lab would specifically be ordered to investigate its nuclear waste dump, Technical Area 54, and other dump areas.

Once the investigation is over, the lab would be required to clean up areas based on the results of the comprehensive environmental surveillance.

Lab critics said Wednesday that, based on the summary of the order sent to interested parties,

See **STATE** *on* **PAGE 2**



JOURNAL FILE

BIOHAZARD: A draft order from the N.M. Environment Department requiring LANL to investigate pollution from dump areas such as this one is expected to be released today.

State Order Tells Lab To Investigate Pollution

from **PAGE 1**

the Environment Department appears to be doing too little, too late.

"This draft order is just a glorified information request for data that the Environment Department should have demanded and the lab should have supplied years ago," said Jay Coghlan, director of Nuclear Watch of New Mexico. "... I'm waiting for the New Mexico Environment Department to order real cleanup."

The lab itself wasn't happy with at least part of the Environment Department's fact sheet — the part saying there has been a finding of "imminent and substantial endangerment to human health and the environment" at the lab.

Beverly Ramsey, the lab's division leader for risk reduction and environmental stewardship, said the lab's own monitoring demonstrates "that risks to the public and the environment from past and current operations are minimal."

"The laboratory remains committed to ensuring the health and safety of our employees and the public, minimizing the impact of laboratory operations on the environment, and providing responsible stewardship of the Pajarito Plateau," she said.

"Despite our basic disagreement with the (Environment) Department's premise, we pledge to continue to work in partnership with NMED in responding to its issues," Ramsey said.

The Environment Department's fact sheet lays out specific methods the lab must use for analyzing the results of the investigations required in the order and says the lab must report its progress to the Environment Department.

James Bearzi, head of the Environment Department's Hazardous Waste Bureau, said he would not discuss the order until it had been formally issued. The department has scheduled a press conference to discuss the order today.

> *"We were hoping and we begged the Environment Department to use the order as a vehicle for ordering actual actions ... that would result in a cleaner environment, and that's not what this is."*
>
> GREG MELLO OF THE ANTI-NUCLEAR LOS ALAMOS STUDY GROUP

Greg Mello of the anti-nuclear Los Alamos Study Group said the draft order "seems to be a recipe for intensive investigation, with no actual cleanup anywhere except as it might occur following the results of the investigation.

"We were hoping and we begged the Environment Department to use the order as a vehicle for ordering actual actions ... that would result in a cleaner environment, and that's not what this is," Mello said.

He said hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent studying environmental problems at the lab.

"We're not confident another year or two of studies will lead to cleanup," he said.

The lab's Ramsey said the lab's activities — including waste treatment, storage, handling and disposal — are conducted in compliance with the appropriate federal and state regulations. The U.S. Department of Energy regulates disposal of low-level radioactive waste at the lab.

"We will have additional comment once the order is released and we are able to digest its content," Ramsey said.

STATE

State agency orders LANL to study, clean up contamination

By DEBORAH BAKER 5/3/02
Associated Press Writer

SANTA FE — The state Environment Department has ordered Los Alamos National Laboratory to do a comprehensive study of contamination at the lab site and then clean it up.

The order, issued Thursday, is intended to speed up ongoing cleanup at the U.S. Department of Energy's nuclear weapons laboratory and draw more federal money for it, officials said.

Environment Secretary Peter Maggiore said the pace of cleanup and the funding "have fallen behind those of other states" where similar efforts are under way.

The department said the presence of hazardous waste at LANL may result in an "imminent and substantial endangerment" to human health or the environment.

That determination, under state law, allows the secretary to issue the order.

Lab officials said they had a "basic disagreement with the department's premise" but would work with the state agency.

Data from a monitoring and surveillance program and from other studies demonstrate that "risks to the public and the environment from past and current operations are minimal," said Beverly Ramsey, leader of the lab's Risk Reduction and Environmental Stewardship Division.

Lab watchdog groups said there was no guarantee the state agency's action would result in faster or better cleanup.

"The order is essentially a glorified request for data that the Environment Department should have demanded — and the laboratory supplied — a decade ago," said Jay Coghlan, director of Nuclear Watch of New Mexico.

For nearly 60 years, LANL — birthplace of the atomic bomb — has generated, stored and dumped various hazardous and mixed radioactive wastes, state officials said.

They include radionuclides, chlorinated and non-chlorinated solvents, high explosives, metals, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), pesticides and nitrates.

"Across the complex, there's a wide variety of contaminants at a wide range of levels," James Bearzi, chief of the department's Hazardous Waste Bureau, said at a news conference.

The order tells LANL to investigate contamination in soils, sediments, surface water and ground water at the 43-

Please see **LANL**, A7

LANL More funding possible for cleanup

From Page A1

Gary Johnson, who has been in office since 1995. But Maggiore said he hoped the next administration would carry through with it.

"It's a very complicated facility, it's a very big facility, there are a lot of different issues, both technical and legal ... We've been deliberate in our process, but the time is right now for us to issue it," the environment secretary said.

The order "gives Los Alamos a foundation upon which to justify more stable and more aggressive funding for the cleanups," he said.

Other states have resorted to lawsuits or similar orders to secure the needed funding for cleanups at federal facilities, he said.

The department has regulatory authority over hazardous waste and waste that is a mix of hazardous and radioactive. Nuclear waste is regulated by the federal government. But department officials said they have the authority to order LANL to monitor radionuclide contaminants and report the results.

According to LANL, it spent more than $800 million over the decade prior to 2001 on a range of environmental activities.

Greg Mello, director of the watchdog Los Alamos Study Group, said there already is "a roomful of information" about contamination at the lab, especially the 26 worst sites.

"For some of those sites, I'm not sure what the point of investigation is," he said.

Environmental groups and Attorney General Patricia Madrid contend that Area G, a nuclear waste dump at LANL, was never properly permitted under federal law. They have been trying to get the Environment Department to close it.

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Op-Ed Page

Bingaman Faces Test On Nuclear Weapons

BY GREG MELLO
Los Alamos Study Group

The Senate Armed Services Committee, of which Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., is a member, must make a serious decision about the future of U.S. nuclear weapons policy. It is one of those moments when what may seem like a small choice will have big consequences.

The question scheduled to come before Bingaman and the rest of the committee on Thursday is basically this: Should the United States develop and build new or modified kinds of nuclear weapons, and construct the new factories needed to produce them?

Some weapons contractors and life-long nuclear weapons advocates claim that these new kinds of nuclear weapons could more adroitly destroy some of the new targets they think we should attack with nuclear weapons, in the new wars they think we should have. It is by no means coincidental that the contractors in question will be paid, and paid unsparingly, to develop these weapons.

In fact, these proposed new weapons would not be any more "useful" than the ones we already have. When all the analysis is done — and it has been done, if the senators care to look — the bottom line is this: There are only so many ways to blow up things and people.

The so-called "robust nuclear earth-penetrating weapon" is not very different, either in design or potential effects, from a weapon the United States fielded for a few years in the 1950s. Everything is about this proposal is "retro." "Ah yes," the proponents say, "you are basically right. That is exactly why we may need to resume nuclear testing in the future, in order to certify the performance of the really special new weapons that are, if our calculations prove correct, just a little bit better."

Hello. Senators, please pay attention. While nuclear testing is not needed for many nuclear weapon modifications, your endorsement of the idea of new weapons commits you and the nation to a course of action that will be difficult to control.

Nuclear weapons are a kind of weapon of mass destruction. Are they legitimate weapons of war? Is planning for their likely use — let's not kid ourselves about this — a net gain in security, or a loss? And then there is another question: should this country abide by the treaties it has signed and ratified, in particular the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), in which we promised to negotiate nuclear disarmament in return for a binding international norm against nuclear proliferation?

Or is searching for the "winning weapon" more important now? The senators won't vote explicitly on these questions, of course. But if they give a green light to new nuclear weapons and new factories, the answers will be plain enough. Then, once solidified in obligations to contractors and employees — set in concrete, as they say — it will be very hard for anyone to change them.

Getting "buy-in," with modest projects at first, is the strategy within the nuclear strategy that is being proposed. Surely the senators understand this. Or do they?

These proposals would implement a central part of the Bush Administration's "Nuclear Posture Review." This strategy insists on new nuclear weapons capabilities, which is to be integrated with military planning and targeting around the world. For the first time, nuclear weapons would become a part of day-to-day planning for battles against non-nuclear adversaries. These so-called "nuclear strike" capabilities would be integrated with proposed new missile defenses, and both of these with conventional "power projection" forces.

To support this "new triad" of military force, it says we need a "revitalized (nuclear weapons production) infrastructure that will provide new capabilities in a timely fashion to meet emerging threats."

Now that the purpose of this "revitalized infrastructure" has been made crystal clear, will the Senate authorize it?

Much of the funding is already in place; funding has been growing since 1995. And in the highly-militarized mental environment of post-9/11 Washington, much of it seems beyond debate. All that's needed now is the authorization to proceed, in whole, or in part.

That's where Bingaman and his colleagues come in. Throughout his career, Bingaman has used his position to support virtually every nuclear weapons project that has been put before him, and then some. On September 25 of last year, only a few days after the 9/11 tragedy, he introduced a floor amendment that aimed at increasing the nuclear weapons budget by a whopping $339 million, $492 million above the Bush request.

The bill failed, but the final nuclear weapons budget was close to what Bingaman proposed. Now the senator must again choose the level of support he gives to weapons of mass destruction. And this time it is a little different — crucially different. Will he utter a clear policy that provides direction to the labs, which for so long have been providing their own direction? Will he passively endorse new nuclear military capabilities, or will he actively and effectively seek to prohibit them? Will he ask for specific line item control for prototyping and field testing, lest Congress lose control over weapons development altogether?

Or will he insert some vague language that seems, on the surface, to satisfy everyone, but which meanwhile allows weapons development to proceed without embarrassing publicity? Bingaman, has to choose.

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LETTERS

LANL Can Lobby Just As Heavily

IN THE ARTICLE "LANL Told To Study Pollution," Journal North May 2, Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group is quoted: "We were hoping and we begged the Environment Department to use the order as a vehicle for ordering actual actions ... " I infer from this that the LASG and perhaps other anti-nuclear groups engaged in the intensive lobbying of the Environment Department. Hopefully, the laboratory can lobby just as intensively to present its position before rules and regulations are issued.

Edgar B. Stein

Los Alamos