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Mr. Richard Mayer
US EPA
1445 Ross Avenue
Dallas, Texas 75202

April 20, 1990

Dear Rich,

Good talking with you on the phone today. As promised I've enclosed a copy of the news articles on the GAO reports about LANL and Sandia labs.

CCNS has a very active "LANL Task Force" working on many of the nuclear safety issues involved at the lab. One of the issues they are pushing is independent monitoring -- which a large majority of the public called for at recent hearings on incineration, and the proposed new plutonium building. This aversion the DOE has to radionuclide monitoring, seems only to fan the flames of the growing public fear that they are trying to hide something. (You are probably aware that the DOE is taking the state's EID to court on this matter).

Please keep us informed of your agencies findings associated with LANL, and on the continuing "SAGA of Model VIII" as well. We are very interested in this issue of independent monitoring of radionuclides.

If there's anything we can do to help you folks, let us know.

Yours truly,

Richard W. Miller
Director



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Many nuclear problems unfixed

WASHINGTON (AP) — The federal government and its contractors have taken care of just 41 percent of the highest priority problems in the nation's nuclear weapons complex, the General Accounting Office has reported.

Even the safety and health hazards at the top of the 1986 fix-up list for nuclear weapons plants hadn't been fixed at the beginning of 1990, the GAO said in a report to Congress.

Overall the government and its contractors had resolved just 34 percent of the health and safety problems identified since 1986, the GAO said.

"It is shocking that nuclear hazards requiring immediate attention got no attention at all," said Sen. Howard Metzenbaum, D-Ohio, who released the report with Rep. George Miller, D-Calif.

"Our work raises questions about the (Energy Department's) commitment to resolving its problems in a timely manner,"

said the report by the GAO, Congress' investigative arm.

The report reviewed the status of problems and their resolution or non-resolution as of January 1990.

According to the report, the Energy Department has logged 113 radiation and other problems that posed "a clear and present danger to workers or the public."

There were 36 such problems at the Rocky Flats plant in Colorado, of which 23 were resolved; 33 at Savannah River, S.C., of which one was resolved; 30 at the Y-12 Plant in Tennessee, of which 12 were resolved; 14 at the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory in California, of which 10 were resolved.

When all types of safety and health problems were added up, the Hanford Nuclear Reservation in Washington state had the largest total, 294, of which 89 had been taken care of. Rocky Flats' total was 262, with 142 problems resolved; and the Feed Material Production Center at Fernald,

Ohio, was ranked third with 186 problems, 46 of which were resolved.

Data on environmental hazards showed Fernald had more problems than any other plant — 68 in all. Among the other major plants, Savannah River and Lawrence Livermore were second with 65 environmental problems; Los Alamos and Idaho Lab each had 59; Hanford and Y-12 each had 58; Pantex in Amarillo, Texas, had 56; and Portsmouth, Ohio, had 55.

At 31 Energy Department-owned nuclear weapons plants and research laboratories, 1,277 environmental problems were logged, including 44 radioactive contamination problems, the report said.

The Energy Department told the GAO none of those 1,277 problems pose an immediate health threat. However, 192 of those problems involve "a high risk for a threat to health," and Fernald had 31 problems in that category — more than any other plant.

Unresolved hazards at LANL yield GAO dismay in report

By KATIE HICKOX and ERIC ANDERSON

Washington Bureau *New Mexican*

WASHINGTON -- More than half of the health and safety problems the Department of Energy identified in 1986 at Los Alamos National Laboratory remain uncorrected although none pose serious health hazards, congressional investigators said Wednesday.

None of the problems are serious threats either to Los Alamos lab workers or city residents, a report from the General Accounting Office said. However, the laboratory is violating federal environmental laws, congressional investigators said.

Most of the lab's violations were administrative, rather than directly related to environmental risk. The study found 124 "safety and health" problems at Los Alamos, 57 of which the Energy Department has corrected.

The GAO, which also studied 17 other contractor-operated Energy Department facilities for the report, did not characterize each of the problems at Los Alamos. Attempts to reach lab officials late Wednesday were unsuccessful.

Nationwide, just one-third of problems at the Energy Department facilities have been corrected, the report said.

"Our work raises questions about DOE's commitment to resolving its problems in a timely manner," the report said.

The congressional investigative office noted that "significant risks" to public health exist at Sandia National Laboratories in Albuquerque. The Energy Department has resolved none of the 57 environmental problems identified at Sandia in 1986.

Another top offender is the Rocky Flats nuclear weapons plant outside Denver. The Energy Department and its contractors at Rocky Flats have resolved only 23 of 36 problems that the agency in 1986 said posed a clear and present danger to the public, the GAO said.

Of another 226 safety and health problems at Rocky Flats that were determined by the DOE to either pose a

significant risk to health or demonstrate noncompliance with DOE's own regulations, just 119 have been resolved, the report says.

The General Accounting Office faulted the Energy Department and its contractors for dragging their feet and not putting a high enough priority on subsequent safety checks.

"The majority of the safety and health problems have not been resolved by DOE and the site contractors," the report said. "And there have been delays in developing action plans to begin to correct problems identified in the environmental surveys."

A spokesman at the DOE said he hadn't seen the report but that most of the deficiencies occurred before new Energy Secretary James Watkins took over.

"This all precedes Secretary Watkins' tenure," said DOE spokesman Robert Griffin. "Everyone has looked at it and says it is a 30-year problem. It can't be turned around overnight."

"DOE's own data show that the majority of the identified problems remain unresolved. Some serious safety and health problems have remained unresolved since 1986 and some plans to address environmental problems have been in process for over two years," the GAO reported.

In some cases the DOE hasn't yet devised plans to correct the problems.

But the Energy Department rejected this, saying the report was dealing with 30 years of neglect and the current administration is in the middle of a five-year plan to correct the hazardous waste problems.

"We are detailing plans for cleanup and working closely with state government to solve these problems," Griffin said.

The report recommends that the secretary of energy develop an overall management plan with clear goals and deadlines to correct the problems.

Katie Hickox and Eric Anderson are reporters for States News Service in Washington, D.C.