

Los Alamos National Laboratory

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LANL
HSAWA

Dear Stakeholder:

These days, people get many chances to have their say on public matters, before a decision is made to act or not. Yet, a question often asked is "Is it worthwhile, does it ever change anything?" Sometimes the answer is yes; things are changed in major ways and much for the better.

Environmental Impact Statements, in particular, seem to some people to be a costly paper exercise. Before you—the great public "jury"—decide what you think, listen to the story of the 1999 Site-Wide Environmental Impact Statement (SWEIS) that analyzed activities at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) for the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). It is a story of an EIS process, of helpful public comments, of a timely response...then a great fire, called Cerro Grande, that proves the value of outsiders' ideas.

The story begins in 1998. The draft SWEIS goes out to the public for comment, and public meetings are held. Public comments come in that are critical of the SWEIS, saying it gives too little thought to the likelihood and the potential harm of a large forest fire at Los Alamos and the Laboratory. Forester Bill Armstrong, of the U. S. Forest Service, submits his then new report entitled, "Analysis of the Risk of Crown Fire Initiation and Spread in the Valle Grande Ecosystem Management Area on the Española District of the Santa Fe National Forest" (April 1998). The Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety (CCNS), a citizens "watchdog" group, strongly supports the views of Forester Armstrong.

In response to the public comments, LANL greatly expands the steps it takes before the 1999 fire season to reduce wildfire risk. These steps include thinning trees and vegetation, especially around some key nuclear facilities, and improving fire roads and fire breaks.

When the Cerro Grande Fire swept down from the mountains this spring, these extra defensive steps, taken in response to the public comments, paid for themselves many times over. The savings were in the form of the harm to facilities that was reduced or avoided, and reduced risk to the public that might have resulted.

These savings are described in detail in a new LANL report entitled, "A Special Edition of the SWEIS Yearbook, Wildfire 2000." (For a copy, call 505-665-8969) It is a story to make one proud—of Forester Bill Armstrong, of public participation in the EIS process, and of those at LANL who acted quickly on the new information gathered. The benefits are to everyone.

Sincerely,

Doris B. Garvey
Program Manager for Site-Wide Issues

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