

Allen, Pam, NMENV

From: Stone, Marissa, NMENV
Sent: Tuesday, November 28, 2006 9:43 AM
To: NMENV-global
Cc: Goldstein, Jon, GOV; Cottrell, Sarah, GOV
Subject: News: Curry: Lab isn't cleaning up its mess

Attachments: Picture (Metafile); Picture (Metafile)



Curry: Lab isn't cleaning up its mess

(2 comments; last comment posted Today 08:42 am)

[print](#) | [email](#) this story

Related Links

[Payouts delayed in lawsuit settlement with Los Alamos lab](#)
[New Mexico Environmental Department](#)

By ANDY LENDERMAN | The New Mexican
November 28, 2006

State Environment Secretary Ron Curry is again leaning on Los Alamos National Laboratory to clean up its mess and protect the state's groundwater.

Curry is pressuring the lab to stick to a historic agreement that calls for the lab to clean up its hazardous waste by 2015. But the lab's new manager has met all requirements and takes its cleanup job seriously, a lab spokesman said.

Curry's discontent was clear in a recent interview. "We went them to get back on track," he said.

The lab should spend its money on actually cleaning up its waste rather than paying fines for violating a legal agreement with the state, he said.

"We want them to embrace it," Curry said of the agreement, or consent order, reached in March 2005. The agreement requires all hazardous waste be dealt with by 2015.

The lab has had four run-ins with the state recently.

Last month, Curry proposed fining the lab \$2.3 million over mixing demolition rubble with other waste on Sigma Mesa.



Also in October, Curry fined the lab \$30,000 for failing to clean up an ash pile where classified documents and trash were burned in the 1950s.

In September, Curry proposed a \$795,620 fine for the lab's failure to quickly report chromium contamination in ground monitoring wells.

And in July, the state proposed a \$125,000 fine when the lab and the National Nuclear Security Administration dumped 20 tons of hazardous waste into a Los Alamos County landfill.

Each of those fines are still being negotiated.

"The laboratory takes its environmental responsibilities very seriously and is following the consent order," lab spokesman James Rickman said in a statement. To date, Rickman said, the lab's new manager -- Los Alamos National Security LLC -- has met all requirements.

Rickman said lab managers agree it's better to spend on cleanup and not penalties. "With fixed funding, it's crucial that the laboratory maximize activities that meet consent order requirements. However, the consent order is heavily weighted toward up-front investigation."

Rickman also said the lab's leaders have talked several times about ways to accelerate the cleanup. The department in particular is concerned about groundwater contamination.

"New Mexico's water resources are so precious, and Los Alamos is just beginning to understand its effects on the groundwater," said James Bearzi, chief of the department's hazardous waste bureau.

Asked to characterize the nature of pollution in the lab area, Bearzi mentioned chemicals, explosives, metals and radio nuclides. "It's quite a cocktail of contaminants in the aquifer up there," he said.

Although hexavalent chromium was found in a monitoring well at four times the drinking water standard, the pollution has not been detected in the regional aquifer, the department reports.

Contact Andy Lenderman at 995-3827 or alenderman@sfnewmexican.com.

The state Environment Department has had several issues with LANL in the past four months.

In October:

ISSUE: Demolition rubble mixed with other waste on Sigma Mesa.

RESULT: Proposed fine of \$2.3 million

ISSUE: Ash pile where documents and other trash were burned in the 1950s is left uncleaned.

RESULT: Fine of \$30,000

In September:

ISSUE: Chromium contamination is not reported.

RESULT: Fine of \$795,620

In July:

ISSUE: 20 tons of hazardous waste are dumped into a Los Alamos County landfill.

RESULT: Fine of \$125,000

Marissa Stone
Communications Director
New Mexico Environment Department
(505) 827.0314 (o)
(505) 231.0475 (c)