

General

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Editorial, 12/31/2006 - Bingaman must bring LANL shirkers up short

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By THE NEW MEXICAN
December 31, 2006

Los Alamos National Laboratory was the hastily built product of wartime -- and things on "the Hill" were hardly less hectic when nearly half a century of "Cold War" followed in the hot one's wake.

This was an installation dedicated to the nuclear supremacy our nation's leaders deemed indispensable; niceties to nature -- including the humankind involved in building ever-better nuclear bombs -- didn't get the consideration that even those environmentally backward times could offer.

Today, science is aware of at least some of the damage done by the stuff strewn in the wake of weapons development. The wizards of LANL should be converting that awareness to clean-up and keep-clean projects remedying the environmental wrongs the lab has done.

So why aren't they?

At Material Disposal Area C, a quarter of a century's worth of radioactive and otherwise hazardous waste was poured into seven pits and more than 100 shafts before lab leaders wised up to the damage they might be doing. Now traces of the stuff are leaking out.

And at Technical Area 3, lab workers dumped anywhere from 50,000 to 230,000 pounds of chromium into Sandia Canyon -- by the lab's admission. But LANL bosses won't admit that chromium showing up in drinking water wells is any but the naturally occurring kind. At 414 parts per billion, it's four times higher than the federal standard -- and eight times the state standard.

When it's taken in above-safe amounts, the stuff can damage the liver, the kidneys or the nervous system.

So folks are naturally nervous. The Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety would like to know at least which direction the chromium is spreading. And the group would also like to know more about a radionuclide called neptunium, which has been found in wells supplying Los Alamos and Santa Fe.

Lab spokesfolks say efforts are being made to punch "sentry wells" near the drinking water wells to keep closer watch on the chromium.



And the neptunium? It, too, is at higher-than-safe levels, the inquiring citizens contend -- whatever effect it might have on the human body. No, it isn't, says the lab.

Who ya gonna believe? Don't answer that.

Back to all that nuclear waste: For all the lab's claims that it's fulfilling a legal agreement with the state on the handling of that aging refuse, New Mexico Environment Secretary Ron Curry says it still hasn't got around to drilling four holes to pinpoint the extent of pollution in the unlined pits where it lies.

So to hold LANL to its word, Curry proposes a \$1,000-a-day fine until the drilling is done -- and safely.

Will that get the lab's attention -- or will the people in charge just chalk it up as a cost of doing the public's business, with the public's money?

The years of LANL arrogance -- or maybe just blinder-wearing dedication to fending off foes real and imagined -- should, by now, be far in the past. And with both New Mexico's members in charge of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, the one that does the decisionmaking on our national laboratories, you'd think that there'd be lots of budgeting for environmental repairs and preventative measures.

For good measure, one of those senators, Pete Domenici, also serves on the appropriations committee. And Northern New Mexico's representative, Tom Udall, is about to join the House Appropriations Committee. These are guys the lab must go to for the money that keeps it going.

The committee leadership is about to be handed off -- from Domenici to Jeff Bingaman. Bingaman, in his gentlemanly fashion, should serve notice, as if any were needed, that the bad ol' days of lab "attitude" are at an end. Lip-service about being good environmental citizens no longer will cut it; action -- verifiable action -- must be taken

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Governor outlines proposals to address global warming

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By BARRY MASSEY | Associated Press
December 28, 2006

SANTA FE (AP) - Gov. Bill Richardson said Thursday he's considering a proposal to require industries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, a move that would be similar to a newly enacted law in California.

Richardson said at a news conference that he is looking at the possibility of pushing legislation similar to a landmark California law that limits greenhouse gas emissions by power plants, oil refineries and other industries.

Earlier this year, California became the first state in the nation to enact such a law, which calls for a 25 percent reduction in emissions by 2020.

Richardson said hasn't made a decision yet on whether such a measure will be part of his agenda for the upcoming Legislature, which convenes Jan. 16 for a 60-day session.

"We're considering it. Our plan is not developed," said Richardson. "But that is a possibility."

The governor made his comments after issuing an executive order that spells out goals and timetables for a