

General

Allen, Pam, NMENV

From: Stone, Marissa, NMENV
Sent: Tuesday, March 06, 2007 10:46 AM
To: NMENV-global
Subject: News: LANL Cleanup

LANL CLEANUP

Domenici: Government needs to step up funding

By **Andy Lenderman**

The New Mexican

U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., says Los Alamos National Laboratory has not received enough government money to clean up its environmental waste and wants to consider changing a legal agreement that governs that cleanup.

New Mexico Environment Secretary Ron Curry shot back he's not interested in renegotiating anything, and cleanup problems have nothing to do with money that comes from the U.S. Department of Energy.

The lab and the state Environment Department signed a historic agreement, or consent order, in March 2005 that spelled out how the lab would go about taking care of hazardous waste left over from the Cold War and how the state would enforce that process.

The lab has received \$240,000 in fines levied by Curry in the past year. Those fines concern four separate incidents. But Domenici says the lab is stuck with

Please see **FUNDING**, Page **C-4**



14630

Continued from Page C-1

insufficient cleanup funding from the federal government and obligations to cleanup the waste.

“We need to find an acceptable solution that makes cleanup a priority for all parties, not simply a stage for excuses and penalties,” Domenici said.

Curry said money is not the problem.

“These initial penalties and fines that have been levied against the lab have nothing to do with the shortfall,” he said. “It has all ... to do with management and management attitude.”

Lab spokesman James Rickman said the lab takes the consent order very seriously.

“We remain committed to the consent order and we will continue to try our best to meet all future consent order milestones and requirements,” he said.

Domenici talked to Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman on Monday. Bodman, Domenici reports, will instruct federal officials “to meet with Gov. Bill Richardson and the New Mexico Environment Department to try to set new cleanup responsibilities that are consistent with realistic budget requests.”

Domenici believes the consent order could be considered for amendment “or changed in a way that suits everybody’s purposes,” spokesman Chris Gallegos said. “The situation we’re under now — it’s not conducive to progress.”

But Curry was quick to point out: “We are not interested in renegotiating the consent order.”

At issue are about 700 cleanup sites on lab property that need to be dealt with.

The estimated cost is about \$1 billion, and about \$140 million toward cleanup has been proposed by President Bush for the coming fiscal year.

Curry said Domenici has expressed his concerns to him in the past “that the state should, you know, slow down and give the new contractor a chance to get his feet on the ground. Our position is still the same.”

Domenici said he’s ready to do what he can for the budget shortfall, “but we need cooperation and good faith efforts on the part of (the Department of Energy) and the state to make the cleanup effort a success.”

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

Albuquerque Journal

Tuesday, March 6, 2007

Cleanup Tied to Lab Funds

By John Arnold

Journal Staff Writer

An "untenable budget situation" is delaying environmental cleanup at Los Alamos National Laboratory, and a cleanup agreement between the federal and state governments may need to be changed to reflect those federal budget restraints, according to U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M.

He said in a news release issued Monday that LANL is "stuck between a rock and a hard place."

"It must make more progress (on cleanup), but its hands have been tied with insufficient funding and now a steady stream of fines imposed by the state," he said.

But state Environment Secretary Ron Curry said poor environmental management at LANL, not lack of funding, is the root of cleanup delays and state fines.

Curry said the state does not intend to renegotiate the so-called consent order, a legally binding agreement that requires the U.S. Department of Energy to investigate and clean up decades worth of contamination across the lab's 40-square-mile property by 2015.

Signed in 2005, the order lays out cleanup milestones and requires the federal government to pay fines if LANL fails to meet them. The state has so far fined LANL \$240,000 for consent order violations, according to the Environment Department.

"Those penalties have arisen because of a lack of proper environmental management and a lack of embracing the order by the people in charge of environmental cleanup for (LANL contractor Los Alamos National Security)," Curry said.

Lab spokesman James Rickman declined to comment on funding issues or the root causes of the cleanup delays, but he said that LANL remains committed to the consent order.

"We will continue to try our best to meet all future consent order requirements and milestones," he said.

The Bush administration is requesting \$140 million in its fiscal year 2008 budget for LANL cleanup. Domenici called that amount, similar to 2007 funding levels, insufficient.

Domenici said that he met with Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman to discuss LANL's cleanup situation and funding. Bodman acknowledged the problem and said he would instruct DOE officials to meet with state officials "to try to set new clean-up responsibilities that are consistent with realistic budget requests," according to Domenici.

Reached by phone late Monday, DOE spokeswoman Megan Barnett could not confirm Domenici's characterization of his discussions with Bodman, but she said that LANL's cleanup program "has faced technical and efficiency challenges and contractor performance issues."

"We are committed to working with state regulators to get cleanup progress back on track," she said.

Domenici plans to address LANL cleanup during a congressional budget hearing on Wednesday.

Marissa Stone

Communications Director

New Mexico Environment Department

(505) 827.0314 (o)

(505) 231.0475 (c)