

General

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From: Stone, Marissa, NMENV
Sent: Wednesday, July 11, 2007 9:56 AM
To: NMENV-global
Subject: News LANL/SF Water/GHG
Attachments: Picture (Metafile)

Bingaman out to slash GHG emissions
<http://www.abqjournal.com/news/state/577322nm07-11-07.htm>

SF Drinking Water Safe
http://www.abqjournal.com/north/577373north_news07-11-07.htm

Group: LANL Dust is Toxic
http://www.abqjournal.com/north/577368north_news07-11-07.htm

<http://www.santafenewmexican.com/news/64551.html>

Watchdog group says sampling found radioactive dust, NM
By DEBORAH BAKER Associated Press Writer

SANTA FE (AP) _ Samples of dust taken last year from homes and workplaces near Los Alamos National Laboratory showed elevated levels of radioactivity, a government watchdog group says.

Some of the worst contamination was found in dust on a bathroom fan at a New Mexico Environment Department lab oversight office in nearby White Rock, the Government Accountability Project reported Tuesday.

There also were troubling results from homes in Picuris and San Ildefonso pueblos; from a vacuum bag at a newspaper, the Los Alamos Monitor; and from soils in public areas in downtown Los Alamos.

Tom Carpenter, director of GAP's Seattle-based Nuclear Oversight Campaign, said it wasn't a fancy study _ 79 samples were taken _ but it points to the need for bigger, independent studies of what the lab's neighbors in northern New Mexico are being exposed to from airborne dust.

"We think dust pathways are ignored," Carpenter said.

GAP said the radionuclides found in the samples "most likely" were generated at the nuclear weapons lab, which has been operating for more than six decades.

Lab officials disputed that, blaming naturally occurring radon and uranium for most of the radioactivity described in the GAP report.

"The primary source of the radioactivity on the indoor dust is not from the laboratory," said Craig Eberhart, an environmental scientist at the lab.

Other radioactivity detected in the study, which was almost certainly from nuclear testing, is a result of global fallout, not lab activities, Eberhart and other scientists told The Associated Press.

The study's author, Marco Kaltofen, said researchers pulled from their archive dust samples from all over the United States for comparison after they started seeing high levels of radioactivity in the samples from Los Alamos. The samples from elsewhere tended to be lower, he said, begging the question why radionuclides, if



naturally occurring, would collect in the Los Alamos area more than anywhere else.

The researchers also conducted isotope analyses to determine possible origins, Kaltofen said.

Eberhart and the other scientists did say a sample from a site in downtown Los Alamos, which GAP said had the highest plutonium level in its study, was contaminated by the Manhattan Project, which built the first atomic bomb.

That site has undergone some cleanup and may be in line for more, the scientists said.

Lab officials said there was nothing new or surprising _ and no threat to human health indicated _ in the study results.

Kaltofen, who works with Boston Chemical Data, Inc., said too little attention has been paid to off-site contamination, how it's conveyed and what can be done about it.

"What the study tells me is that we have missed whole areas of science that need to be explored to understand what the true dose is to the people that live in the area," he said at a news conference.

Low levels of off-site radioactivity can pose a higher risk to human health than on-site materials, because radioactive contaminants collect in residential dusts and remain there for long periods, the study said.

"It's very concerning to my people. ... It's affecting us all," said Picuris Pueblo Gov. Craig Quanchello.

Samples of dust, soil, plants and wood ash were taken in November from homes, businesses, farm fields, roadside areas and a park.

"What we wanted to look at were areas where people are working and living," Carpenter said.

While dusts accounted for only 20 of the 79 samples examined, seven of the eight samples with the highest radiation levels were dusts, according to the study.

State Environment Secretary Ron Curry said his agency welcomed such outside studies _ it cooperated with last year's sampling _ but that the results of the testing in the White Rock office didn't indicate elevated health risks.

Employees in that office "regularly wear radiation detection badges as part of their work duties and these badges have never shown dangerously elevated exposures," Curry said.

Curry said it would be useful, however, to learn more about the radiation in the dust and that the department would conduct more tests.

BC-NM--Los Alamos Contamination

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