

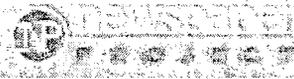
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Wednesday, April 01, 2009

\$384M To Fund Nuclear Cleanup

By [John Fleck](#)
Journal Staff Writer

The federal government will pump \$384 million into New Mexico's nuclear institutions to clean up and dispose of old Cold War waste in one of the largest economic stimulus investments in the state.

Los Alamos National Laboratory will get \$212 million between now and 2011 to clean up radioactive waste on an old lab site next to the community of Los Alamos.

The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, a nuclear waste disposal site near Carlsbad, will get \$172 million to prepare waste at sites around the country for eventual shipment to New Mexico to be entombed in WIPP's underground salt mine.

A significant part of the WIPP money would be spent at nuclear sites around the country, not in New Mexico, officials said Tuesday.

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The money is part of \$6 billion allotted for nuclear cleanup as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, passed by Congress in February to inject money into the nation's ailing economy.

The money will allow Los Alamos to speed up work needed to meet state-mandated cleanup milestones, according to a statement issued by Michael Graham, head of the lab's cleanup program.

“Completing these cleanup activities — in some cases ahead of schedule — will make a real difference in the region and help us get closer to our goal of eliminating hazards from historic operations,” Graham said.

Located on high mesas west of the Rio Grande in northern New Mexico, Los Alamos has been a center of nuclear weapons research and manufacturing since it was established in 1943 to build the first atomic bombs. In the past two decades, it has grappled with expensive and difficult cleanup of waste and contamination left by decades of work with the hazardous materials used in nuclear weapons.

The focus of the newly funded cleanup will be on what is called DP Mesa, a site where work with dangerously radioactive plutonium and other materials was done from 1945 to 1978. The lab has been working for years on cleaning up the site, and the stimulus money will be used to speed up efforts.

The money will also pay to clean up the Tritium Systems Test Assembly building, which operated from 1984 to 1999, working with radioactive tritium, a substance used in nuclear weapons.

Gov. Bill Richardson issued a statement praising the Los Alamos allocation, saying it would help the

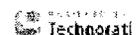
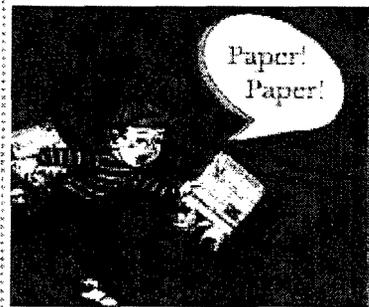
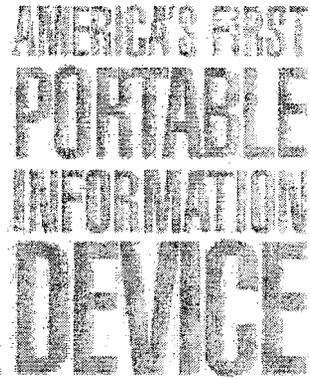
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Department of Energy meet its legal obligations to New Mexico, but also said more is needed.

“We will continue to push for additional funding until all appropriate cleanup and remediation is completed,” Richardson said.

The WIPP money will be used to speed up the time-consuming task of analyzing waste around the country that is being prepared for shipment to New Mexico.

Located in the desert east of Carlsbad, WIPP is a 2,150-foot-deep mine dug in salt beds for permanent disposal of waste contaminated with plutonium and other radioactive substances.

WIPP sends teams to sites around the country to review waste scheduled for shipment to ensure that it meets state and federal rules governing what can and cannot be legally disposed of. The infusion of stimulus money will speed that process, said Casey Gadbury, who is overseeing the WIPP stimulus work.

Some of that work will be done at Los Alamos, preparing waste there for shipment to WIPP, Gadbury said. In addition to Los Alamos, workers will be dispatched to Hanford in Washington state, Idaho National Laboratory and Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee to do work under the WIPP stimulus package.

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