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ALBUQUERQUE

JOURNAL

TUESDAY
January 29, 2002

North

EDITION

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Steve Yanicak, manager of a state Environment Department's Oversight Bureau for the federal Department of Energy, consults a data book while taking filtered spring water samples Monday near the Rio Grande in White Rock Canyon. The samples will be checked for contamination by perchlorate, a chemical used at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

Springs Tested for Chemical

■ *State, LANL at odds over reliability of methods used*

BY MARK OSWALD
Of the Journal

WHITE ROCK — In an event as much REI as DOE or EPA, a group of officials from the Los Alamos National Laboratory and a lab oversight office hiked down the steep walls of White Rock Canyon on Monday morning to collect water samples along the Rio Grande.

The point of the exercise — and there was plenty of that — was to try to determine if a series of springs in the canyon are contaminated with perchlorate, a non-radioactive chemical that has long been a staple of the Los Alamos lab weapons work.

At the first spring, staffers from the state Environment Department's DOE (federal Department of Energy) Oversight Bureau used tubes and a filter to remove partic-



A map showing the location of one of several springs at the bottom of the Red Dot Trail in White Rock Canyon is displayed Monday by Los Alamos National Laboratory hydrologist David Rogers.

ulates to take water samples from a spring covered with bright green duckweed.

But the daylong hike may not settle the issue of whether perchlorate has made its way to the springs, despite the gallons of water samples hauled back up the stairway-like Red Dot Trail for tests.

That's because of disagreements

among the various agencies over the reliability of different methods of testing water for perchlorate.

David Rogers, a LANL hydrologist, previously reported finding small levels of perchlorate — from two parts to 8.5 parts per billion — in some spring water samples taken in 2000 and 2001.

But Monday, during a stop at an old campfire site, he said revised, improved analysis by LANL consultant General Engineering Laboratories appears to show those results were inaccurate.

"We think they were false positives," Rogers said.

And Rogers said it's questionable whether any testing can reliably detect perchlorate in quantities below four parts per billion.

The state Oversight Bureau, however, intends to use a Colorado lab to analyze the samples, and that company — Acculabs — says it can in fact provide accurate findings of

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Springs Tested for LANL Chemical

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perchlorate at levels below 1 part per billion, according to Oversight Bureau officials.

Rogers called the Colorado lab's "mass spectography" method of analysis "experimental."

Steve Yanicak, manager of the Oversight Bureau, said the method isn't new although its application to detection of perchlorate is.

And Greg Lewis, director of the state Environment Department's Water and Waste Management Division, said the state "has no reason to believe" results from Acculabs are not accurate. He said the federal Environmental Protection Agency used the Colorado lab's findings.

Rogers said, "We're all interested in using the best method.

"The real question is what is the floor of credibility," he said.

Lewis said that if solid evidence proves that perchlorate



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CHECKING THE FLOW: Greg Helland with the LANL Water Quality and Hydrology Division makes notations while measuring water flow from one of the springs along the Rio Grande where water samples were taken Monday.

exists in the spring water, the next step would be to try to find the source of the contamination. The perchlorate could

come from the lab, but other potential sources include fertilizer and potash, Lewis said.

Joni Arends of Concerned

Citizens for Nuclear Safety, also along for the hike, said her biggest concern is that perchlorate in the springs could be "showing a pathway" for how other pollutants from the lab — including plutonium — could reach the springs and the river.

She also provided documents that LANL officials presented to a citizens advisory board that she said show that the Acculabs analysis method holds up under controlled testing situations.

The EPA has not set a safety standard for perchlorate in drinking water. But Rogers said that according to draft information, the EPA appears to be heading for a standard of one part per billion.

The state and LANL previously have been in dispute about whether LANL notified the Oversight Bureau of its earlier percholate findings in a timely manner.

Court Monday that DeVal gas had contacted him and brought him to Aarons' office.

Aarons explained he then handed Garcia-Rivera a sub-