

November 5, 1992

Joyce Hester Laeser  
Counsel  
DOE, Los Alamos Area Office  
Los Alamos, New Mexico 87545

Re: The Attached Article on the Plutonium Spill

Dear Joyce:

Please find attached a copy on the newspaper article we spoke about earlier in the week. The Region is very dismayed about the statements in this article by Mr. Gustafson which places the blame for LANL's plutonium leaks on EPA.

This is patently false. As you know, the policy he refers in the article is a DOE internal policy on which EPA did not take a position. These kinds of statements also damage the working relationship we have tried to build and which is necessary to effectively solve LANL's long term environmental compliance problems.

With the above in mind, the Region would like a full report on these spills. Please describe the releases, when and where they occurred. Describe the tank or tanks involved, what processes were involved, how long the tanks were used for storage, the type of plutonium isotope involved, describe the type of hazardous waste involved, explain and document whether these spills were contained in secondary containment or whether there was any release of neither radionuclides or hazardous waste to the atmosphere or the environment. Also, please describe how each of these spills were cleaned up or remediated.

I also would request that a conference call be arranged between the Region, DOE-LANL and the University, so that the apparent misunderstanding that the University has, as to EPA's role, can be rectified. Please call me by Monday November 9, 1992 to arrange this call. Further, the Region would like to have the answers to the above questions by November 16, 1992. If necessary, I can arrange for a more formal RCRA § 3007 information request letter to be sent the University. Please let me know if this will be necessary.

Sincerely,

*Bruce*  
D. Bruce Jones  
Assistant Regional Counsel  
Multi-Media Section



15278

TL/TO

0071  
Permit

*Stone*

cc: Sheila Brown, CU LANL

bcc: ~~Nick~~ Stone (6H-C)  
Steve Mason (6E)

Albuquerque Journal

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New Mexico Press Clipping Bureau  
Albuquerque, NM

# Plutonium Leak 3rd At Lab Since May

By John Fleck 800

JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

A worn-out gasket allowed a gallon of a plutonium-acid solution to spill onto the floor at Los Alamos National Laboratory either Sept. 13 or 14, laboratory officials acknowledged Friday.

The toxic liquid did not escape the building, and no workers were exposed, said Los Alamos spokesman John Gustafson.

Gustafson said it is the third time since May that a gasket in Los Alamos' plutonium laboratory has failed, leaking the dangerous liquid onto the floor.

Laboratory and Department of Energy officials refused to release written reports on the incident, but Gustafson said in a telephone interview the acid in a tank of plutonium nitrate solution ate through the Teflon gasket.

He said the leak was discovered by workers arriving Monday morning, Sept. 14, indicating the tank began leaking over the weekend.

Gustafson said the three leaks are a direct result of a regulatory dispute between the DOE and the federal Environmental Protection Agency that has halted work in the plutonium laboratory since May.

Currently, the laboratory has no way to dispose of mixed radioactive and chemically hazardous waste and no permit to store it. The EPA and the Energy Department have been negotiating a new permit since May.

In the meantime, all operations

that generate such mixed radioactive/chemical wastes, including operations in the plutonium laboratory, have been shut down.

Lacking a permit, laboratory workers have been unable to empty the tank of plutonium-acid solution to do routine maintenance, including checking and replacing the gaskets, Gustafson said.

The liquid vats are used in the laboratory's plutonium-reprocessing operation, turning scrap plutonium waste into pure, usable plutonium.