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November 19, 2001

Elizabeth Withers
NEPA Compliance Officer
Los Alamos Area Office
528 35th Street, MS-A316
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Dear Ms. Withers:

RE: PREDECISIONAL DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR THE PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION AND OPERATION OF A BIOSAFETY LEVEL 3 FACILITY AT LOS ALAMOS NATIONAL LABORATORY, LOS ALAMOS, NEW MEXICO; DOE/EA-1364; OCTOBER 29,

This transmits New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) staff comments concerning the above-referenced Predecisional Draft Environmental Assessment (PDEA).

Background:

Biosafety Level 3 (BSL-3) facilities provide sites for safe and secure manipulation and storage of infectious microorganisms.

The Department of Energy (DOE) National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) proposes to construct and operate a BSL-3 facility at one of three potential locations at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). Two of the potential locations are within Technical Area 3, and one is within Technical Area-58. According to the proposal, the facility would be designed and operated in accordance with guidance for BSL-2 and BSL-3 laboratories established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of health. No radiological material would be used or stored in the BSL-3 facility and no research animals or plants would be housed in the facility.

The proposed action is to construct a 3,000 square foot, one-story permanent facility with two BSL-3 laboratories with adjoining individual mechanical rooms separated by a central support BSL-2 laboratory. The Partial Prefabrication/Build Alternative involves the purchase and installation of ready-assembled BSL-2 and BSL-3 modular units. The Prefabrication Alternative involves the purchase and installation of a ready-assembled prefabricated BSL-3 modular unit as a stand-alone facility while constructing a permanent building on-site. It appears that the



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proposed action or the alternatives could be completed at either the TA-3 or TA-58 locations. Under the No Action Alternative, a BSL-3 facility would not be constructed at LANL.

According to the proposal, the potential for harmful human health effects from the operation of the facility is low. However, according to the February 2001 Inspection of Department of Energy Activities Involving Biological Select Agents, (Appendix E), "...the Department activities lacked appropriate federal oversight, consistent policy, and standardized implementing procedures, resulting in the potential for greater risk to workers and possibly others from exposure to biological select agents and select agent materials."

NMED has the following recommendations relative to the above-stated observations:

1. The DOE should take the necessary steps to correct the February 2001 findings of the Inspector General.
2. The Solid Waste Management Units (SWMU) that are near proposed buildings should be investigated and remediated before building construction.
3. The document should but does not include a timetable for the proposed or alternative actions.

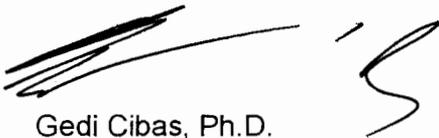
A major concern of the Department's Hazardous Waste Bureau (HWB) regarding this proposal is the possibility of placing new structures over existing SWMUs.

There are a number of SWMUs located at TA 3 near proposed building location Option A. Although, most of these SWMUs have been accepted for no further action by HWB, there are a few that have not satisfied HWB's requirements for determining the nature and extent of contamination. Specifically these are SWMU # 3-014(y) & (k) sanitary sewer drain lines and, SWMU # 3-037 consisting of two 4500 gallon underground storage tanks. Constructing a building near or over these sites may prevent further investigation and remediation. Therefore, HWB recommends these sites be investigated and remediated prior to building construction.

Proposed location Options B and C do not appear to be placed in the vicinity of any SWMUs.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on this document.

Sincerely,



Gedi Cibas, Ph.D.
Environmental Impact Review Coordinator

NMED File No. 1532ER