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LABORATORY RESPONDS TO NMED DRAFT ORDER

LOS ALAMOS, N.M., July 31, 2002 — Officials at the U.S. Department of Energy's Los Alamos National Laboratory today filed the laboratory's response to a draft order issued May 2 by the New Mexico Environment Department.

The laboratory's response strongly reaffirms its overall institutional commitment to environmental stewardship, yet challenges the draft order's statement that legacy contamination at the Laboratory represents an "imminent and substantial endangerment," and objects to the department's attempt to regulate radionuclides and other substances that are regulated by other agencies. In a cover letter to Secretary Maggiore, John Browne, director of Los Alamos National laboratory, and Ralph Erickson, director of the Department of Energy's Office of Los Alamos Site Operations, request that "...NMED withdraw the ISE determination and take no further action on the draft order."

"For many years the laboratory has had a productive and cooperative relationship with the New Mexico Environment Department in which the laboratory and the department have agreed on an overall environmental stewardship strategy that protects the environment and accelerates the cleanup of legacy waste," said Jim Holt, associate director for operations. "Although we have fundamental disagreements with the language and regulatory scope of the draft order, we agree with the department that environmental stewardship should remain a core discipline in laboratory operations."

The laboratory and the department have worked cooperatively for the last decade on a number of environmental cleanup and environmental monitoring strategies designed to minimize potential risk to people and the environment from legacy and on-going operations at the Laboratory.

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