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LANL Issues Comments on NMED's Corrective Action Order

Los Alamos National Laboratory (or LANL) this week released its rebuttal to the draft Corrective Action Order issued by the New Mexico Environment Department (or NMED) on May 2nd. The 145-page comment states that the order, "does not support a finding of imminent [and] substantial endangerment associated with [LANL]." LANL claims that, prior to May 2nd, NMED "continually reassured the public to the contrary." According to Jim Holt, LANL's assistant director for operations, it was previously believed that LANL's environmental management and cleanup strategies had the full support of NMED.

The order requires LANL to mitigate damages from the release of hazardous waste or other constituents that may pose a threat to human health or the environment. Although LANL estimates that complete remediation could take as long as 40 years, NMED's order provides a framework that reduces that time by half. James Bearzi, of NMED, said, "this is our sincere attempt to accelerate [the cleanup process]." LANL responded that both its efforts and those of NMED would be better served by focusing on the cleanup program already underway at LANL. However, according to a 1997 DOE Inspector General's report, of the \$360 million spent by LANL for cleanup by 1995, a mere 20% was spent on actual cleanup, such as moving contaminated soil, indicating that a regulatory response by NMED was required.

A representative of NMED said that the department will respond to comments received from LANL and others, including CCNS, in 30 to 60 days.

Read CCNS's comments to NMED's Corrective Action Order for Los Alamos National Laboratory.

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<http://www.nuclearactive.org/> (8/2/02)



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