

Permit



Comments by Ken LaGattuta

Friday, April 16, 2010, 2:00 PM

These comments are by Ken LaGattuta, private citizen and resident of Española, New Mexico. They are being presented at the Hazardous Waste Permit Hearing, held today in the Pojoaque Cities of Gold Conference Center. The Hearing is now in its tenth full day.

I am a PhD physicist, retired for the last four years, following twenty years of employment at Los Alamos National Laboratory, in the Applied Physics Division (X-Division). Prior to my LANL years, I worked for seven years as a Research Associate Professor of physics at the University of Connecticut. I have lived in Española for seventeen years.

During the past two years I volunteered my time to the DOE's Northern New Mexico Citizens Advisory Board (NNMCAB), where I became familiar with issues concerning hazardous waste generation, storage, and treatment at LANL. While with the NNMCAB I also learned about the sometimes difficult relations between the present regulator, the Hazardous Waste Bureau (HWB), an arm of the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED), and LANL's present owner, the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), as well as LANL's current management contractor, Los Alamos National Security Limited Liability Company (LANS-LLC). I also learned about the role played in these relations by local citizens groups such as Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety (CCNS), Nuclear Watch of Northern New Mexico (NWNM), and Citizens Action of Albuquerque (CAA), as well as local pueblos, especially those allied into the Eight Northern Pueblos; e.g., Pojoaque, Santa Clara, Ohkay Ohwingeh, San Idelfonso, Tesuque, Nambe, Taos, and Picuris.

It was with much interest that I heard testimony presented at this hearing. I have also listened with interest to comments presented by many private citizens.

I have been particularly struck by the emphasis placed by private citizens on the call for an information repository, to be located on the campus of Northern New Mexico College (NNMC). As conceived, this repository would be for the purpose of accumulating and making available to local residents information relating to the history of the generation, storage, and treatment of hazardous waste at LANL, as well as relating to the history of relations between the local communities and the DOE, the NNSA, and LANS-LLC, and to relations with the previous management contractor, the University of California (UC).

It appears that NMED is well aware of a desire on the part of local citizens for such an information repository. In fact, Mr. James Bearzi, head of the HWB/NMED, addressed this issue in Sect. IV. D. of his written testimony. However, he said in that testimony that it is the opinion of NMED that an electronic information repository should suffice.

Even so, he also says in his written testimony (Sect. IV. C.) that NMED is attempting to adhere to Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) concerns for the promotion of

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environmental justice among local communities. Such concerns require that local communities be provided with all possible opportunities to participate in decisions related to local environmental matters; e.g., matters resulting from the actions of government in New Mexico, especially the federal government.

In this regard, environmental justice concerns would be better met, in my opinion, by the establishment of a permanent information repository at NNMC, than with a simple electronic repository. In my view, if such a repository is to serve the purpose for which it is intended, it must have an on-site staff, trained in its maintenance, and able to assist local citizens in their quest for information.

Mr. Bearzi also refers to the RACER database in his written testimony (Sect. IV. G.) He points out that RACER is a compendium, in electronic form, of environmental data recorded in and around the Pajarito Plateau. He notes too that this database is already fully accessible to the general public (at least that part of the general public that has access to a PC and a high-speed data link) and is being well-maintained by the Los Alamos Community Foundation. He does not mention that it is currently a part of the RACER plan that RACER shall eventually be maintained by a staff located at NNMC.

I would like also to recall a critical public comment made at this Hearing, this past Tuesday, regarding the influence of LANL on the local economy. In this remark it was suggested that an unfortunate dependency had been created in the local community on the economic benefits brought here by LANL, over the last sixty years.

It is in this context that I would like to speak briefly about the last few months of my two years of service on the DOE's NNM CAB. It was during this time that I first recognized the presence of a tension between Board members who believed that economic benefits brought by LANL to the local communities were always of paramount concern, when dealing with regulatory matters, and other Board members who felt that health matters were much more important. In an attempt to quantify the strength of such opposing opinions, and the degree to which such opposed opinions were wide-spread in the local community, I conducted a public opinion survey.

This survey was conducted in the fall of 2009 in the towns of Santa Fe and Española, and accumulated responses from 225 persons. The questions in the survey were written, the survey administered, and the results analyzed entirely by myself. In an effort to obtain, some technical guidance in this matter, I did consult briefly with a staff member from Research and Polling, Inc. of Albuquerque.

The results of the survey can be perused in my attached report. In quick summary, these results show that there are indeed two strong attitudes about LANL to be found within the local community. One attitude is of appreciation for the economic benefits brought here by LANL. The other attitude is one of worry about possible environmental hazards arising from the type of work done at LANL. This second attitude is combined with an uneasiness about the nature of that work itself; i.e., the R&D of nuclear weapons.

Simplifying somewhat, approximately 25% of respondents felt that the economic benefits brought by LANL were great, while environmental hazards were of little concern, and uneasiness about nuclear weapons R&D was just not a factor. Approximately 25% of respondents felt just the opposite; i.e., while economic benefits did not impress them, the threat arising from environmental hazard was great, and the culture of nuclear weapons was rejected strongly. Interestingly, ~50% of respondents displayed both attitudes simultaneously. For these conflicted individuals, there was an awareness of a clear economic benefit brought by LANL to the local community. At the same time, however, worry about possible environmental hazards due to the business of LANL, and uneasiness about the nuclear weapons industry was also great.

In closing, I make the claim that it is the effect of LANL's business on the local community which should be the subject of further study. Evidently, this effect is perceived to be wholly positive by some, and wholly negative by others but, generally, both positive and negative effects are experienced simultaneously by at least half the members of the local community.

Thank you for your attention.