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State of New Mexico
ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT
DOE OVERSIGHT BUREAU

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GARY JOHNSON
GOVERNOR

PETE MAGGIORE
SECRETARY



1919
Reference

FACSIMILE TRANSMITTAL SHEET

TO: Rich Mayer DATE 11-5-99

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MESSAGE OR INSTRUCTIONS

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MEXICAN

FRIDAY
SEPTEMBER 24, 1999
FIFTY CENTS

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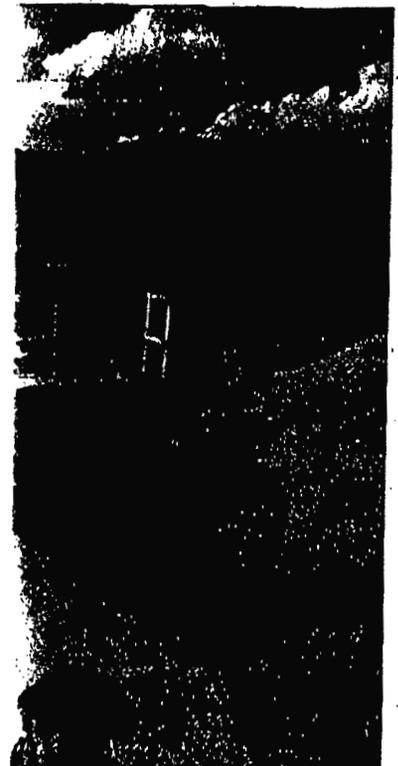
ee WATER, Page A-3



While putting in a flume to measure Santa Fe River water flow, Matthew Varela, left, of Sangre de Cristo Water Co., Amy Lewis, with the city of Santa Fe, left center, Felix Lujan, right center, with the water company, and Marlo Calabaza with the Santa Fe LOCALS Program fill sandbags to form a small dam to direct the water through the flume north of Camino Real on Thursday.

Craig Fritz/The New Mexican

concerns



Richie Mole of Santa Fe catches some air as he rides the half pipe at the Los Alamos skate park on the southern edge of town.

Clinton vetoes GOP tax-cut bill

Knight Ridder Newspapers

WASHINGTON — President Clinton Thursday ceremoniously kept his promise to veto a Republican tax cut, clearing the way for a protracted struggle with the Republican-controlled Congress over how to spend the federal government's money.

Clinton said the \$792 billion tax cut Congress passed at the height of summer was "too big, too bloated, places too great a burden on America's economy." But the measure passed narrowly in the House and Senate, leaving no chance that GOP lawmakers can muster the two-third majority needed to override Clinton's veto.

Republicans had anticipated the veto, and now are stonewalling



President Clinton

Move sets the stage for a battle with Republicans over federal spending

are too high, government doesn't need the money, so taxpayers should get a refund," said Rep. Bill Archer, chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee and the principal architect of the tax cut.

Though Clinton and House Speaker Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., suggested that a deal could be brokered on a smaller tax cut, the most pressing issue now facing Congress and the White

CONTAMINATION CONCERN

► State study finds possible elevated levels of plutonium near Los Alamos-area canyon

By **BARBARA FERRY**
The New Mexican

Preliminary results from a new study of a recreation area in Los Alamos show levels of plutonium among the highest found anywhere around Los Alamos National Laboratory, a state official says.

The contamination was discovered in surface soil in a narrow drainage leading into Acid Canyon, near downtown Los Alamos. The area, which encompasses about 1,000 feet, is unfenced and is visited by hikers, people walking dogs and children playing. The contaminated area is crossed twice by a walking trail.

The lab transferred the canyon to Los Alamos County in the 1960s.

Steve Yanicak of the New Mexico Environment Department said initial test results show levels of plutonium significantly higher than those previously detected.

"We are especially concerned because this area is accessible to the public," Yanicak said. "This is not something we take lightly."

Ray Sisneros, solid-waste director for Los Alamos County, said he could not comment on the findings because he had not seen them yet.

Yanicak declined to release the exact test results, saying that under an agreement with the Department of Energy, the DOE is given the opportunity to review the data first.

A study by the lab in 1981 found the maximum concentration of plutonium in the soil to be 639 picocuries per gram. The study concluded that there were no health risks tied to the dumping of plutonium and other wastes into the canyon.

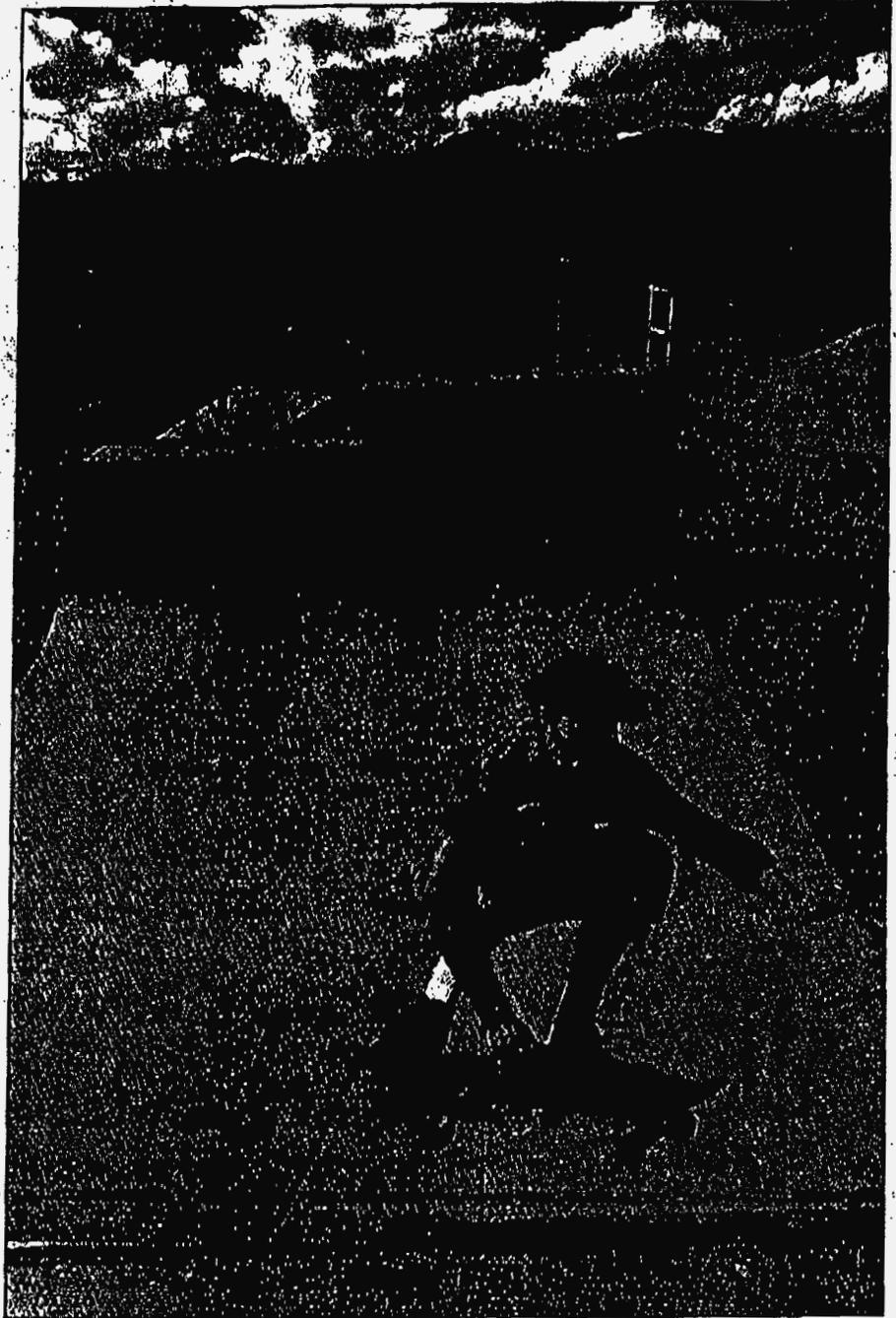
The preliminary findings from the new study show levels of contamination that are significantly higher than that, Yanicak said.

By comparison, Lawrence Livermore lab in California has agreed to clean up plutonium contamination in concentrations above 10 picocuries per gram in soil in industrial areas and 2.5 picocuries per gram in residential and park areas, according to Marylia Kelley, director of Tri-Valley CAREs, an environmental group near Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. The cleanup plan follows remediation guidelines established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency regional office in San Francisco.

A spokesman for Los Alamos National Laboratory said that preliminary results can turn out to be false.

"The lab has stopped releasing preliminary data because on a number of occasions the data has later been proved to be wrong," said spokesman John Gustafson.

On one occasion, preliminary samples



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taken from a park in Los Alamos initially appeared to contain high tritium levels, Gustafson said. But the findings turned out to be from a control sample for tritium, he said.

"If we had waited to release (the data) we could have spared everyone a round of confusing news stories," Gustafson said.

"Acid Canyon has been researched and researched, again and again, and everything we know shows it does not present a health risk," he said.

But he added, "the (new) information needs to be carefully studied to determine if there is any risk to public health. We hope to work with the state to resolve the issue."

The director of an environmental group in

California that has pushed another lab to clean up plutonium in a park public should be made aware of findings, even if they are preliminary.

"The lab should post information what they do know so that users of the park can make an informed decision about whether they want to take a risk by walking through the canyon," said Kelley, director of Tri-Valley CAREs.

Yanicak said the contamination was probably not detected earlier because old tests of testing sediments were less refined. In the past, the lab tested random samples from the canyon, taking samples every 1

Please see **CANYON**.

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Officials are especially concerned because this area is accessible to the public," Yanicak said. "This is not something we take lightly."

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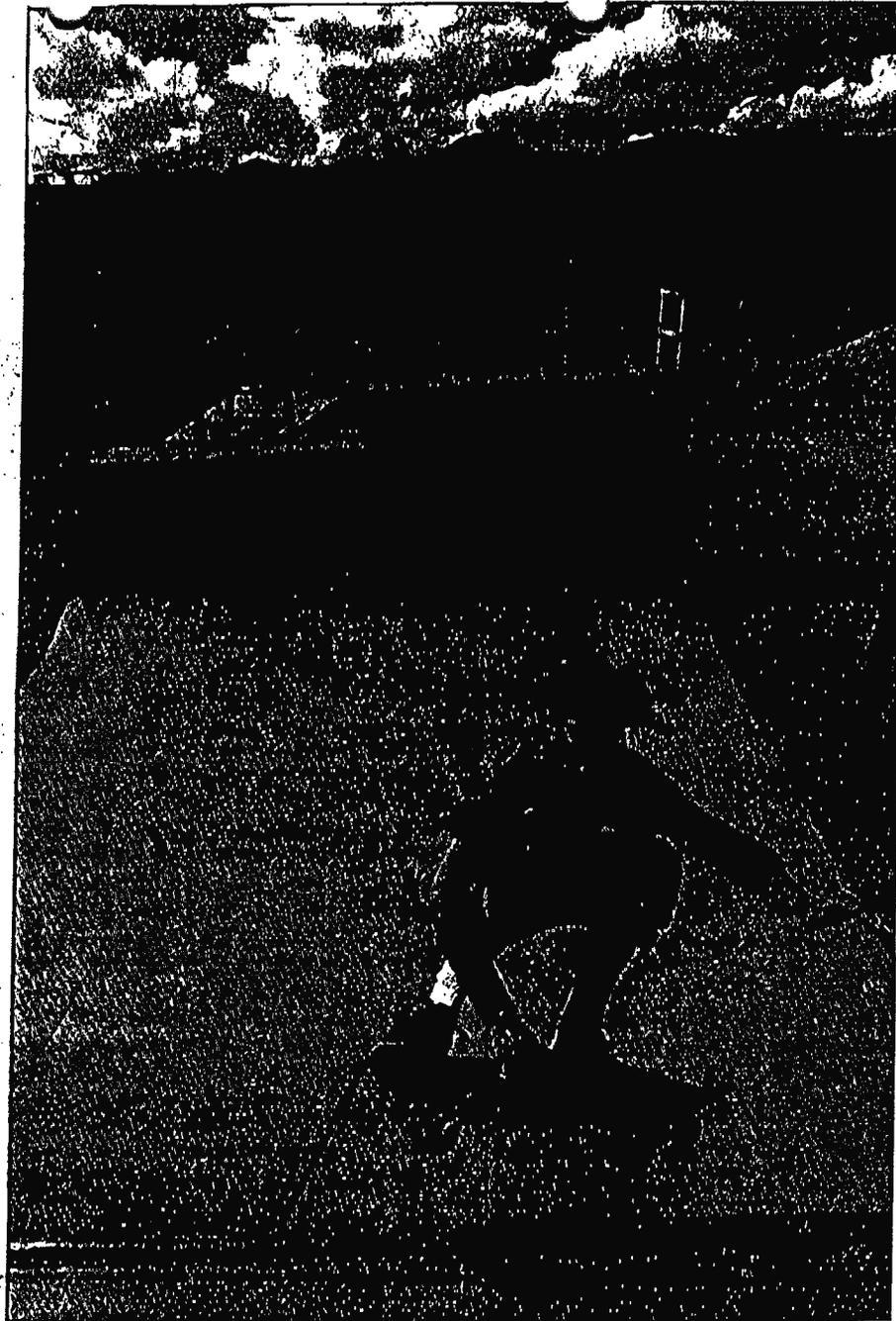
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The lab has stopped releasing preliminary data because on a number of occasions it has later been proved to be wrong," Gustafson said. "On one occasion, preliminary samples



Richie Mole of Santa Fe catches some air as he rides the half pipe at the Los Alamos skate park on the southern edge of Acid Canyon. Preliminary test results, which are not considered conclusive by Los Alamos National Laboratory officials, indicate the possibility of elevated levels of plutonium in the canyon.

Clyde Mueller
The New Mexican

taken from a park in Los Alamos initially appeared to contain high tritium levels, Gustafson said. But the findings turned out to be from a control sample for tritium, he said.

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California that has pushed another national lab to clean up plutonium in a park said the public should be made aware of new findings, even if they are preliminary.

"The lab should post information about what they do know so that users of the canyon can make an informed decision about whether they want to take a risk by walking there," said Kelley, director of Tri-Valley CAREs.

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Please see CANYON, Page A-2

INSIDE TODAY

NASA's \$125 million Mars

which was on a mission to study

steady flow CANYON

Continued from Page A-1

river flows and ground-
seepage might also help
be a case for why the city
be able to "look at a more
ctive use" of its surface
groundwater rights, said
Lewis, the city's hydrolo-

have to make an argument
state engineer's office that
rights are interconnected,"
d. "In other words, when
not using surface water,
harging the aquifer."

city of Santa Fe now has
rights to use up to 5,040
et of surface water from
ta Fe Canyon, and 4,865
et of groundwater from
the city. An acre foot is
o about 325,000 gallons —
ount of water it takes to
n acre to a depth of one

city cannot substitute
ights from one source for
her, although officials
like the flexibility to
p the total water rights in
se to changing conditions.

en we have a wet year, and
ul (canyon) water, we
se that water and rest the
not pump the wells, and
hat water for drought
Lewis said.

man said such an applica-
the state could be a couple
s away, and "it's a bit pre-
to speculate how it's
o go."

In the 1990s, lab environmental
investigators developed a new
method for zeroing in on "old"
sediments that have remained in
place since the 1940s.

Investigators now take sam-
ples near natural and man-made
landmarks — such as trees and
old tires — that appear to date
from the era when dumping
occurred, Yanicak said.

Samples taken using this new
method are the ones that appear
to be contaminated, Yanicak said.

Plutonium, a radioactive iso-
tope used for the triggers of
nuclear weapons, has been linked
to lung cancer if inhaled, even in
extremely small quantities.

Preliminary data from the soil
samples also indicate previously
undetected polychlorinated
biphenyls, or PCBs as well as
lead, cadmium and radioactive
americium.

PCBs are a known human car-
cinogen. They also can cause
skin problems for those who
come in direct contact with
them, according to the federal
Agency for Toxic Substances
and Disease Registry.

The contaminants likely date
from the 1940s, when Manhattan
Project workers dumped
untreated radioactive liquid
waste from a lab facility on top
of the mesa into the canyon.
From 1951 until 1964, the lab
dumped treated radioactive li-
quid waste into the canyon.

In 1966, the lab cleaned up
contamination at the lip of the
canyon, removing rock from the
canyon walls and truckloads of
dirt from the canyon floor, said
lab spokesman James Rickman.

Despite concluding in 1981 that
there were no health risks tied to
dumping, the lab did an additional
canyon cleanup in 1982, removing
rock and soils near the untreated
waste outfall, Rickman said.

Based on these studies, LANL
recently applied to the state
Environment Department to
have the drainage area to Acid
Canyon removed from the lab's
list of contaminated or potential-
ly contaminated sites. The state
was asked by the lab to rule that
no additional action was needed
to clean up the drainage.

But before ruling, the state
decided to take another look,
Yanicak said.

"What caught our attention
was that we saw kids down there
playing army games and people
walking their dogs," Yanicak
said. "We also suspected it might
be bad because bad stuff went
down there."

It will now be up to the Depart-
ment of Energy and Los Alamos
County to review the data and fig-
ure out what to do, Yanicak said.
"The county is going to have to
pow-wow with DOE and with us to
figure out what the numbers mean
and where we go from here."

Yanicak said that options may
include scooping out the contam-
inated soil or fencing off the

area. But he said the environ-
ment department does not have
the authority to force the lab or
county to fence off the area.

"I would just suggest that they
get on it really quickly and see
what's there," Yanicak said. "We
still have a lot of questions. Are
they any more hot spots? Have
we found the hottest hot spots?
We don't know the answers."

In the early 1990s, Acid
Canyon came under scrutiny
after Tyler Mercier, a Los Alamos
sculptor raised the possibility
of a cluster of brain tumors in
Los Alamos. Mercier suggested
that Acid Canyon, which in the
1940s was used as both a radioac-
tive dump and a playground for
children, was to blame.

Two women, Peggy Franklin
and Sonya Lujan, sued the lab
for \$50 million in the early
1990s, charging that the lab did
not adequately protect them or
their children from radioactivi-
ty. Franklin said that she rode
her bike through the canyon in
the 1940s while it was being used
as a radioactive dump.

Investigators' studies did not
prove that a brain-cancer cluster
existed.

In 1992, a group of lab officials
and Los Alamos community resi-
dents took news media, school-
children and others on a tour of
the area to show that it was safe.
During the tour children played
in the dirt while television cam-
eras rolled, *The New Mexican*
reported at the time.

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most campus (http://www.lanl.gov/edu/edu8001) demonstrates there is a broad range of computer science, basic engineering and electronics course offerings at all three facilities. While I don't know that there is anything proprietary about a Dell computer that the contract mandates the contractor must provide and service, I would think Dell has enough business acumen to quickly assist and train any company that purchased 1000 of its computers on anything that might be unique to its product.

If, on the other hand, the lab is saying it doesn't have confidence in the product that our higher-education facilities are turning out, we have got to pay attention. There are high-tech businesses in this state that are going to have to rely on the graduates of these schools. It would serve our interests to ensure that the programs at these schools are designed to serve the needs of an economic behemoth such as LANL. The lab, as a good neighbor, should ensure this is being done by actively participating in the development of the curriculums at these schools.

Perhaps adding insult to injury, the Albuquerque company is the incumbent firm performing this same contract for which it had received accolades from lab officials for providing good service at competitive prices. And, the Albuquerque company's bid for the contract came in lower than that of the San Diego company.

Beyond the fiduciary responsibility of seeking the low-bid contract from a capable enterprise, the lab's responsibilities to its neighbors must be strongly rooted throughout the organization. And like any strong and committed contractor, it must develop and sustain viable sources of supply. It is incumbent upon the lab to foster strong, long-term ties to its suppliers. Leaving them out in the cold as a reward for doing a good job isn't behaving very neighborly.

One hopes it is not exclusively the director at the lab who is focused on community relationships — including economic development, jobs and building a strong neighborhood. It is much too big a job for any one person. The dedication must permeate throughout the organization. And the organization must remember that actions speak louder than press releases.

There is great untapped potential for Northern New Mexico economic development in the lab. Great strides are yet to be made in exploiting this potential. But even great strides must begin with small steps.

Joseph Montes, a Santa Fe native, is a former national administrator of the Small Business Administration's 8(a) Program (1987-1990) and deputy director of the Office of Minority Economic Impact at the U.S. Department of Energy (1991).

imontes@concentric.net

Logging is the problem not the solution.

Bryan Bird
Rio Grande Chapter Sierra Club
Forest Conservation Council
Santa Fe

LANL, surroundings

I am not surprised that soil levels of plutonium in a Los Alamos canyon are a lot greater than the lab admits.

Birth dearth

#1

Babies should be a reason for joy. Instead, the arrival of the 6 billionth member of humanity some time around now is being greeted with gloom.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) worries that the fastest

THE ECONOMIST growth is in the poorest countries. A new study financed by Cornell University frets that 12 billion people will suffer miserably by 2100.

Ever since the days of Malthus, demography seems to have inspired despondency. At a local level, in overcrowded places, such gloom can be justified.

In 50 or 100 years' time, however, most countries are more likely to worry about the lack of babies than the excess. For there is now a serious possibility, encapsulated in the lowest of three projections made by the U.N., that world population growth will stabilize by around 2040 at about 7.5 billion — and then start to decline.

Improbable? Economists have predicted a birth dearth before, on the eve of the Second World War, and been wrong. But fertility decline is now universal and rapid. Repeatedly, the U.N.'s demographers have revised down their population projections.

In the rich world, the fall in fertility has had much attention: in 61 countries, it is at or below replacement rate, implying an eventual fall in population. But the change has occurred even faster in poor countries. Since 1969, developing countries have seen fertility fall from six children per woman to three.

For the moment, the effect of this astonishing trend has been disguised by the fact that the number of women of childbearing age has almost doubled, and that child survival and the average life span have both risen.

It will be clearer around 2010 when, if the U.N.'s "low fertility" projection turns out to be the right one, the number of babies born into the world will fall below the number needed for replacement.

Making long-term projections, even demographic ones, for such things is notoriously hazardous. And many of

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In late 1996, I was invited to a meeting of the Canyon's Working Group of the lab's Environmental Restoration Program. I brought along a retired lab environmental scientist, now an octogenarian, who was concerned about past dumping practices in Mortandad Canyon. Without performing many actual measurements, the group had convinced itself that no contamination had migrated "beyond the lab's boundary."

This is an old mantra at DOE sites. Legions of loyal subcontractors seem to believe that radionuclides also follow marching orders issued by the legal department. Magically, contamination stops just short of the site boundary.

"Not so," bellowed my octogenarian retiree friend. He proceeded to recount how in the 1950s large discharges of waste into Mortandad Canyon had prompted him and a co-worker to investigate whether long-lived fission products had migrated onto Indian land beyond the lab's boundary. Indeed they had.

I applaud the NMED Oversight Bureau for its courage in releasing the preliminary data on Acid Canyon. Citizens and federal health agencies should stand firm to support NMED. Space limitations do not allow me to recite here the litany of important preliminary findings that have died suddenly on the message tables of the data didders.

Ken Silver
S.M. Consultant
Santa Fe

Environmental health

New Mexico is at a crossroad with federal agencies who have targeted our area for expansion, production, development, testing and research.

Much of the nuclear-weapons industry is relocating from labs shut down because of contamination. The state of New Mexico Environment Department is on the verge of issuing a permit to sanction the opening of WIPP.

Things look bleak as NMED chooses to green light full-out expansion and colonization by the U.S. Department of Energy and its corporate co-conspirators. The 15-day comment period ended Sept. 28. Still it wouldn't hurt to call NMED's secretary, Pete Magglore, at (505) 827-2855,

Tobacco con job

Your column (Sept. 25) by tobacco-industry apologist Amy Ridenour damning President Clinton has got to be one of the most blatant examples of Orwellian logic I've seen. She claims that the effect of the tobacco addiction is to save the government money, by causing premature death of people who would otherwise draw more years of Social Security.

All that she proves by this is that she, and the other industry flacks desperate to put a positive spin on smoking, are either stupid, or liars, or both, and that they're also morally at a very low level. The major effect of smoking on the federal treasury is to take money from the government (and therefore, society). For every four committed long-term smokers, one contracts emphysema, one contracts lung cancer, one suffers worsened cardiopulmonary symptoms, and one escapes with no ill effect. Society (via the government's Medicaid and Medicare programs) picks up most of this expense.

It is remarkable that Ridenour's charlatanism can gain mainstream circulation. But then, isn't today's Congress ruled by the party that despite its elephant symbol takes its orders (and soft money) straight from Joe Camel?

Abe Jacobson
White Rock

Inept foreign policy

Re: "China rejects idea of human rights intervention," Sept. 23.

China is not the only country rejecting the "latest" concepts from Bill Clinton's inept foreign-policy team as many nations, including Russia and India, are currently scrambling to establish new joint security arrangements to counteract what they perceive as NATO's barbarous aggressiveness as so clearly demonstrated in its illegal war against Yugoslavia's civilians.

Though the idea of intervening on behalf of human rights is certainly noble, we must ask certain critical questions before we use violence to counteract violence. First of all, will our intervention improve the situation? Have we exhausted our diplomatic efforts? Is the intervention supported by the international community? Are we breaking international laws and codes of conduct?

Voices

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Abe Jacobson
White Rock

In the case of NATO's war on Yugoslavia, which intervention had very little to do with any humanitarian motives but was really designed to create new NATO member states and the intervention has exacerbated the already fragile conflict.

Dr. Michael Praves
Las Vegas

I applaud the NMED Oversight Bureau for its

THE SANTA FE



MEXICAN

THURSDAY

NOVEMBER 4, 1999

FIFTY CENTS

is running on empty

waiting times have said Director Gor-

the agency is rene- or contracts and save more money most drastic mea-

forced to go to that, h the lines will be said Deputy Tax Burleson, whose sees the MVD. Eden contend law- ended the agency



Sen. Billy McKibben

'I've just about had it with the MVD, and I think a lot of other people have too.'

during the last legislative session. The division requested \$11.9 million and received \$11.4 million — a difference of \$500,000. But MVD

officials had promised to save \$300,000 by hiring a Canadian company to make the state's license plates, leaving a difference of \$200,000.

The MVD plans to take the emergency request to the Legislative Finance Committee when it meets later this month, and hopes to get approval from the full Legislature during its 2000 session, which begins in mid-January. Burleson said the agency's money could run out in February, several months before the new fiscal year

starts July 1.

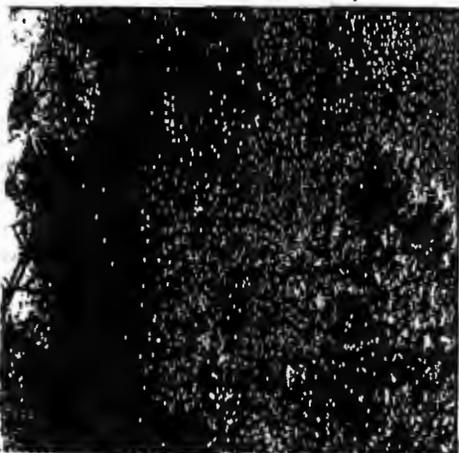
But at least some lawmakers won't be receptive — and won't accept blame for alleged under-funding.

"I've just about had it with the MVD, and I think a lot of other people have too," said LFC member Sen. Billy McKibben, R-Hobbs, citing Gov. Gary Johnson's 1997 promise to end the MVD's long lines and poor service or "deserve to be run out of town."

Please see EMPTY, Page A-2

problem?

os Alamos park where ected contamination



Parent Mark Gonzales, right, questions Agua Fria Elementary School Principal Wanda Trujillo on Wednesday about the staffing problems that have affected the school. Behind Gonzales is another parent, Eutimio Ortiz.

Jillie Graber
The New Mexican



Agua Fria staffing problems continue

Principal: Elementary school just can't find any qualified teachers

Plutonium problem?

LANL conducting tests near Los Alamos park when state found higher-than-expected contamination

By BARBARA FERRY
The New Mexican

Los Alamos National Laboratory is conducting a new study of a public park near downtown Los Alamos where state officials have found plutonium contamination at levels the laboratory previously said did not exist there.

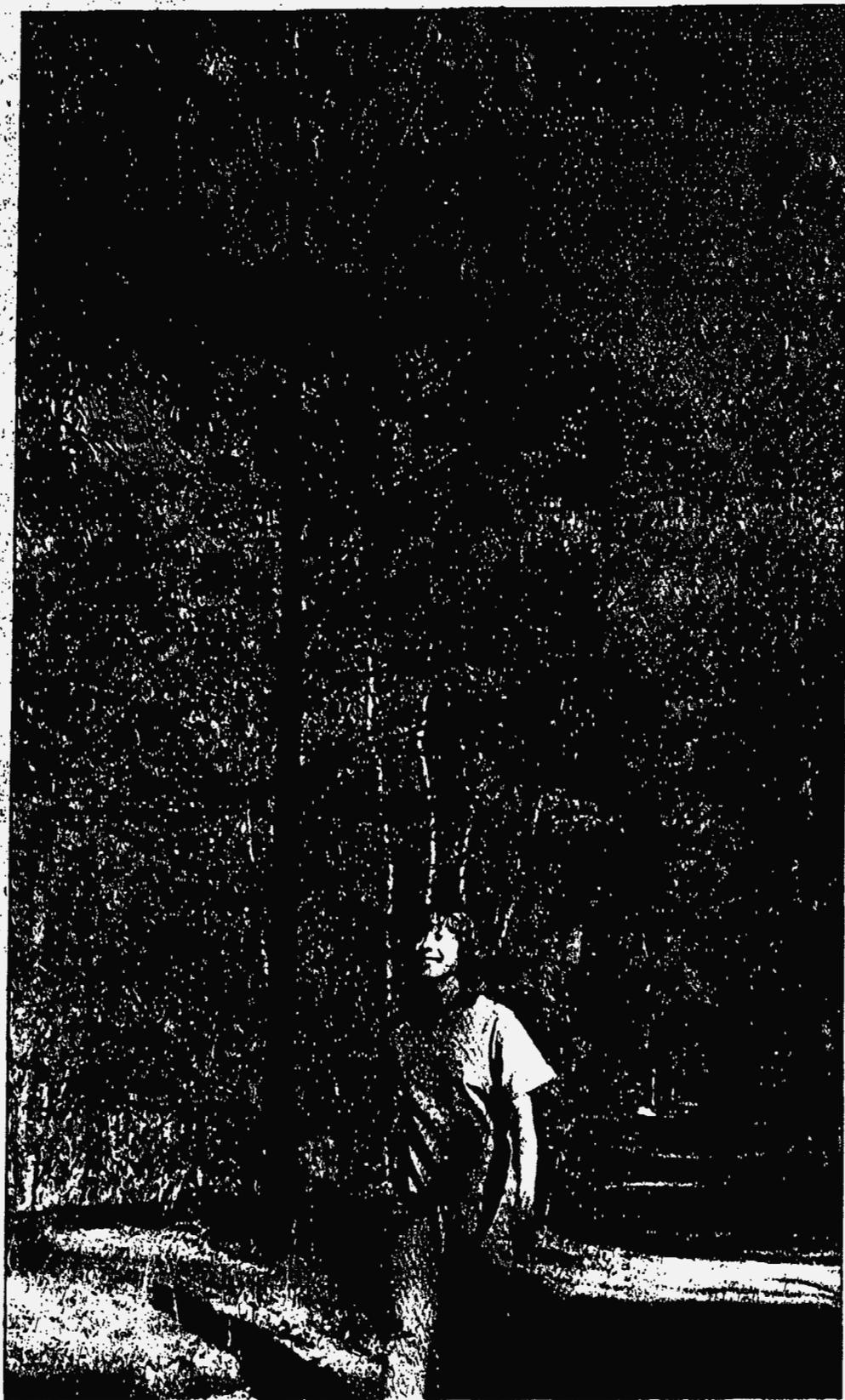
Plutonium and other radioactive contaminants were discovered in soil samples taken by the New Mexico Environment Department in August and September from the banks of a dry stream bed that leads into Acid Canyon, near downtown Los Alamos. Since the 1960s the land has been owned by Los Alamos County. The sampled sites are in an area crossed by walking trails that now goes by the name Kinnikinnik Park.

The soil samples taken from the banks of the channel turned up levels of radioactive plutonium 239 ranging from 2.25 picocuries per gram of soil to 1,880 picocuries per gram. The highest level was found in soil between 1½ and 3 feet deep in an area about 20 yards from a walking trail.

Plutonium 239 has a half-life of 24,000 years. It can cause cancer when inhaled into the lungs even in extremely minute quantities.

By comparison, Lawrence Livermore Laboratory in California has agreed to clean up plutonium contamination in recreational and residential areas above 2.5 picocuries per gram, a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency official said.

"Eighteen hundred and eighty picocuries is a very high number," said Steve M. Dean, a radiation expert with U.S. EPA's California office who monitors Superfund sites — polluted areas that are on a federal priority list for cleanup. "With 1,880 picocuries, what you've got is a site that's way beyond what any Superfund guidelines



For a year
Kathy
Nussdorf
taken her
daily
afternoon
walk on the
Acid Canyon
Trail in Los
Alamos. She
resides
Nussdorf
works in
Alamos. State
officials
shouldn't
until a fire

up levels of radioactive plutonium 239 ranging from 2.25 picocuries per gram of soil to 1,880 picocuries per gram. The highest level was found in soil between 1½ and 3 feet deep in an area about 20 yards from a walking trail.

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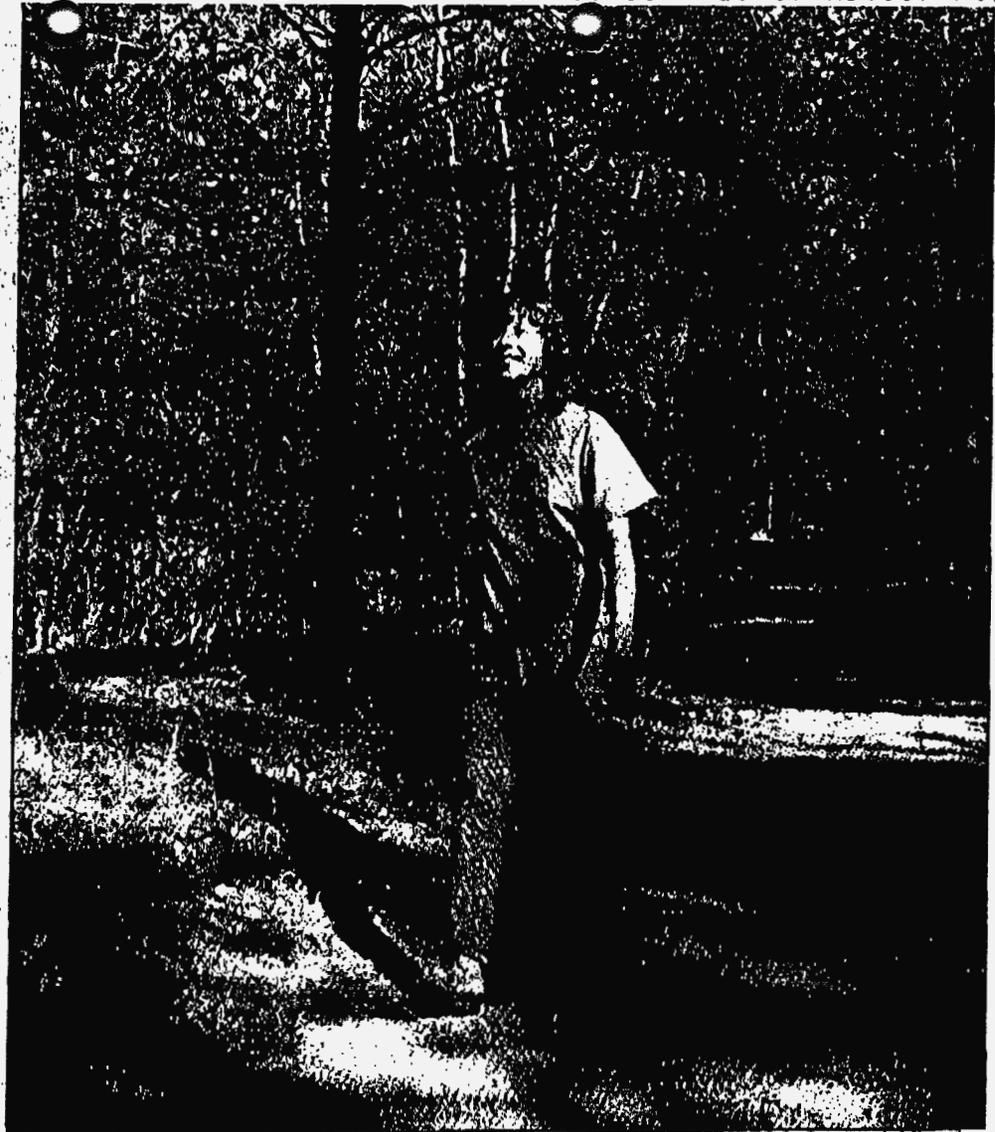
By comparison, Lawrence Livermore Laboratory in California has agreed to clean up plutonium contamination in recreational and residential areas above 2.5 picocuries per gram, a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency official said.

"Eighteen hundred and eighty picocuries is a very high number," said Steve M. Dean, a radiation expert with U.S. EPA's California office who monitors Superfund sites — polluted areas that are on a federal priority list for cleanup. "With 1,880 picocuries, what you've got is a site that's way beyond what any Superfund guidelines would find acceptable."

"If I found a number like that, I would be concerned and would want to know more," Dean added. "It would say to me that you've got a site that needs more cleanup."

State, DOE and laboratory officials said they want to know more about the site, too, but said the new findings don't necessarily mean that the area needs further cleanup.

"It could turn out that the risk assessment we have now remains in place," said Joe



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Vozella, assistant manager for environment at DOE's office in Los Alamos. However, Vozella said that "as a good neighbor" the lab may choose to clean up "hot spots" voluntarily even if it

determines it doesn't need to do so.

John Parker, head of environment department division that oversees LANL, said, "We don't have enough data to say what

the nature and extent of contamination there is. It does seem that there is a possibility of contamination there."

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INSIDE TODAY

The West's Oldest Newspaper



Mostly sunny and mild. High 69, low 30.

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Shepard killer found guilty

Los Angeles Times

DENVER — A high school dropout who blamed drugs, alcohol and an unwanted sexual advance for his crime was convicted Wednesday in Laramie, Wyo., of felony murder in the beating death of gay student Matthew Shepard.

The jury rejected the prosecution's first-degree murder charge against Aaron McKinney, 22, finding that the brutal attack was not premeditated.

Felony murder case because McKinney was convicted of aggravated kidnapping. McKinney's conviction as the victim of seven men and friends in the Albany Court of Appeals. The onetime rape penalty or life in prison moves to the state prison begins today.

McKinney and Henderson lured a man at the Univ

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downtown Los Angeles in the 1960s the area owned by Los Alamos National Laboratory. The sampled area crossed by the road that now goes by the name of Bikinnik Park. Samples taken from the channel turned out to have radioactive plutonium from 2.25 picocuries per gram of soil to 1,880 picocuries per gram. The highest concentrations found in soil were 3 feet deep in places up to 20 yards from a

plutonium-239 has a half-life of 24,100 years. It can cause cancer if inhaled into the lungs. The extremely minute particles

in comparison, Lawrence Livermore Laboratory in California is trying to clean up contamination in an area of residential and commercial buildings. Environmental Protection Agency official said. "We've found a hundred and eighty sites with a very high number of picocuries per liter. Environmental Protection Agency official said. "We've found a hundred and eighty sites with a very high number of picocuries per liter. Environmental Protection Agency official said. "We've found a hundred and eighty sites with a very high number of picocuries per liter."

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For a year, Kathy Nussdorf has taken her daily afternoon walk on the Acid Canyon Trail in Los Alamos. Santa Fe resident Nussdorf, who works in Los Alamos, said officials shouldn't wait until a final determination is made before posting signs warning hikers of possible danger.

Clyde Mueller
The New Mexican

Vozella, assistant manager for environment at DOE's office in Los Alamos. However, Vozella said that "as a good neighbor" the lab may choose to clean up "hot spots" voluntarily even if it

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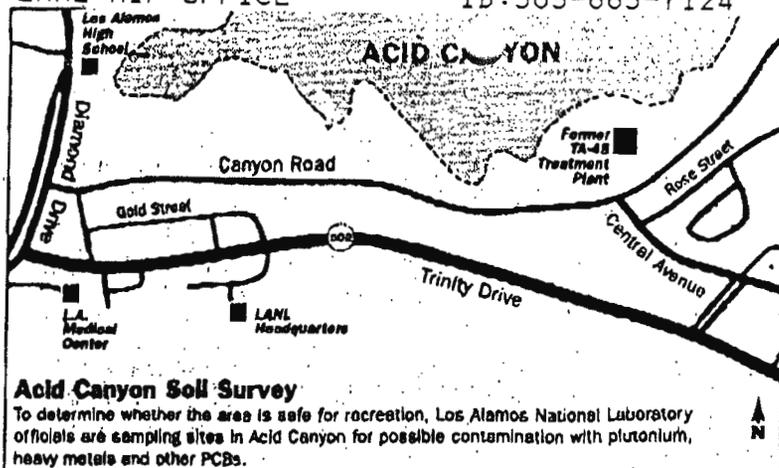
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The onetime roofer will receive a 15-year penalty or life in prison if he moves to the sentencing. The sentencing begins today.

McKinney and his



Chris Morgan/The New Mexican

PROBLEM

Continued from Page A-1

greater than what was perceived previously." Parker said the state, DOE and the lab are cooperating on the new study of the site.

Vozella said the three agencies have agreed that the plutonium contamination the state tests found poses no immediate health risk.

Los Alamos County's administrator said the county has no immediate plans to post signs in the area warning of potential contamination.

"The last report we got from LANL said that the area was safe and that there were no measurable areas of contamination," said Los Alamos County administrator Joe King. "We have the new data, but we don't understand what it means."

King said he is waiting for the lab to explain the significance of the new test results. He said in the meantime posting signs would "unduly alarm people."

But one hiker, who walks the area daily on her lunch hour, said she would rather officials informed her of potential problems before they make a final determination of the site's safety.

"I don't want to hear 10 years from now that the park is contaminated and they're closing it, and meanwhile I've been walking there for the past 10 years," said Kathy Nussdorf, a Santa Fe resident who was walking in the park Wednesday.

"This is a park, a place which invites the public in. I want as much information as possible so I can make my own decision about whether I want to go in there," Nussdorf said.

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MARYLIA KELLEY
director, Tri-Valley Cares

said that despite that fact that the lab had proposed that Acid Canyon be scratched off the list of contaminated sites, the lab had already been planning to do these additional studies. "But because of the concern and reports in the media, the schedule has been accelerated slightly," Roark said.

In September, after the state said it had preliminary test results showing plutonium at higher than previously detected levels, a lab spokesman said that "Acid Canyon has been researched and researched again and again and everything we know shows it does not present a health risk."

The environment department's oversight bureau monitors cleanup at LANL, but does not regulate radioactive contaminants such as plutonium. Two federal officials disagreed Wednesday whether the lab was bound by any federal standards for cleanup of radioactive materials in soil.

Environmental advocates said that such contaminants on federal sites often fall into a regulatory black hole. "DOE is self-regulating, and that's the problem,"



Clyde Mueller/The Ne

This is one of the sites located at the base of a pine tree in Acid Canyon where New Mexico Environment Department officials to sample.

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Greg Mello, director of the Los Alamos Study Group in Santa Fe, said that state residents should be thankful that the state is collecting its own samples. "The state caught something that might have slipped through the cracks otherwise," Mello said. "They deserve a lot of credit."

But while the state environment department oversees DOE, its oversight bureau's entire \$2 million a year budget is made of up DOE funds, putting it in a precarious position, said Ken Silver, a public-health researcher in Santa Fe.

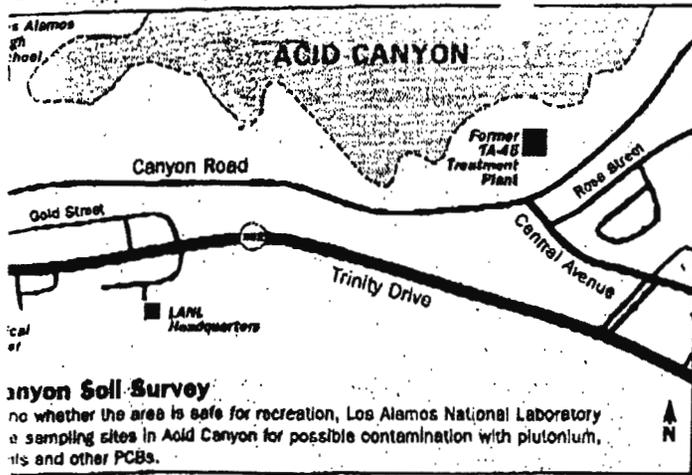
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The head of an environmental group near Lawrence Livermore Laboratory that has pushed the lab to clean up plutonium nearby park said the process should be brought into process in Los Alamos.

"What makes sense to me is that DOE and Los Alamos hold a public meeting with an input from the community," Marylia Kelley, director of Tri-Valley Cares. "In the interim, the lab has an absolute responsibility to post cleanup signs to allow residents to decide whether they wish to come into contact with this site."

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"This is a park, a place which invites the public in. I want as much information as possible so I can make my own decision about whether I want to go in there," Nussdorf said.

"I think parents who are concerned about radioactivity have a right to know whether they want to let their kids play there," she added.

The laboratory dumped untreated liquid radioactive waste into Acid Canyon during the Manhattan Project. In 1951 the lab built a liquid-waste treatment plant on the lip of the canyon. Effluent from the treatment plant was dumped into the canyon until the plant was closed in 1964, according to lab documents.

The canyon was cleaned up twice — once in the 1960s before it was given to Los Alamos County, and again in 1982. After the second cleanup, the lab said residual plutonium was below 100 picocuries per gram of soil.

In the early 1990s the canyon came under renewed public scrutiny after Tyler Mercier, a Los Alamos sculptor, suggested there was a cluster of brain cancers in Los Alamos. Mercier pointed to Acid Canyon — which was used as play area for children in the 1940s while untreated waste was being dumped there — as a possible cause. A brain-cancer cluster was never proven.

After a review of its data and more sampling, LANL and Department of Energy officials determined that the area posed no health risks. The laboratory proposed to the state the site be taken off a list of sites that had been contaminated by the lab.

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But in the mid-1990s the laboratory developed a new soil-sampling method allowing researchers to zero in on areas more likely to be contaminated. With the new approach, researchers take samples near physical barriers such as trees and old tires that prevent sediments from washing away.

"Using this method we try to target the areas where we expect to find the highest levels of contamination," said Parker. "So that is what you're seeing now."

The lab plans to do geological mapping of the site and to take 15 more soil samples of the area before the end of November, Vozella said. The new data will be used to recalculate the risk assessment which the lab previously used to determine that the area was safe. The lab expects to have its new study of the site completed by the spring, he said.

Lab spokesman Kevin Roark



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