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Subject: CCNS News Update, 2/5/03 - 2/12/03**Date:** Wed, 5 Feb 2003 18:22:22 -0700**From:** Joni Arends <jarends@nuclearactive.org>**To:** ralph_fordschmid@nmenv.state.nm.us, david.englert@nmenv.state.nm.us,
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CCNS NEWS UPDATE

Runs 1/29/03 through 2/5/03

(THEME UP AND UNDER)

This is the CCNS News Update, an overview of the latest nuclear safety issues brought to you every week by Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety. Here is this week's top headline:

Elevated Plutonium Levels Found in Stormwater Runoff from Pueblo Canyon.

* The New Mexico Environment Department (or NMED) announced recently that it has found elevated levels of plutonium-239 in Pueblo Canyon stormwater runoff near Los Alamos National Laboratory (or LANL) following the May 2000 Cerro Grande Fire. Samples collected from Pueblo Canyon after storms indicate as much as 94 picocuries of plutonium per liter of stormwater, which is approximately 100 times the level that LANL reported between 1995 and 1999. This is the highest level of plutonium ever found in runoff from LANL.

Dr. Arjun Makhijani, of the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research in Maryland, said, ³While the canyon water is not used for drinking directly, 94 picocuries per liter may indicate a larger problem. Moreover, the plutonium Safe Drinking Water standard of 15 picocuries per liter annual average is over 100 times more lax than the Colorado surface water standard.²

The Cerro Grande Fire burned through 7,500 acres of LANL property, denuding mountainsides resulting in increased runoff and erosion. Last November, NMED recommended that the Department of Energy ensure that LANL's stormwater monitoring system was adequate and study what corrective action measures would be necessary to guarantee that contaminated runoff does not transport to the Rio Grande.

James Rickman, LANL representative, says, ³These data aren't really new. [LANL] has known about this issue of elevated radionuclides in runoff and associated sediments.² Nevertheless, LANL has yet to take steps to correct the runoff problem, although Rickman said they are currently working with NMED to establish a course of action. However, Rickman also said that the runoff cannot be stopped until the vegetation in the mountains and canyons surrounding LANL is restored. He said, ³This stuff is going to continue to move during the rainy seasons until the watersheds in upper Pueblo Canyon and elsewhere around [LANL] are restored.²

Activists recommend that rather than wait for vegetation to stop the spread of contaminants, LANL enact a cleanup strategy around the canyon system. Joni Arends, of Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety, said, ³There are two ways to stop the spread of contamination in the canyon. The first and most obvious is to stop creating the contamination. The second is to clean up the existing contamination before it has the opportunity to move. I think the recent sampling results from NMED show us that it is time for LANL to pull out the vacuum cleaner, as they did in the South Fork of Acid Canyon in 2001, and start cleaning up their mess. Also, we have to consider the animals that depend on this water for sustenance, particularly during drought conditions. Although they are not considered in impact studies, they too are affected by plutonium intake.²



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2/6/2003 7:58 AM

Local public health representative Carol Miller is particularly concerned about the sampling results, considering that plutonium exposure has been proven to be carcinogenic. Miller said, ³How much more data do New Mexicans need before they demand that [LANL] be closed and cleaned up? We have learned in the past few years that tritium, perchlorate, and now plutonium are leaving the hill for the precious waters of the Rio Grande.²

This has been the CCNS News Update. For more information about these or other nuclear safety issues, or to hear this broadcast again, please call the CCNS Radioactive Hotline at 1-800-456-8863 or download the audio version of the Update from our web page at nuclearactive.org.

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