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# Core holes indicate diesel leaked from TA-21 tank

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LOS ALAMOS, N.M., April 5, 2002 -- An investigation into the whereabouts of diesel fuel missing from an above-ground storage tank at the U.S. Department of Energy's Los Alamos National Laboratory indicates that at least some of the missing fuel leaked as a result of a deteriorating pipe.

"Although I deeply regret that this environmental incident occurred, I am pleased that our investigations have identified the site of contamination and now allow us to plan appropriate remediation activities," said Jim Holt, associate director for Laboratory Operations. "Cleaning up this area is a high priority for the Laboratory and we will initiate remediation work as soon as possible in coordination with NMED."

Los Alamos officials in late February notified officials with the New Mexico Environment Department and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that up to 48,000 gallons of diesel fuel was missing from the above-ground storage tank, located at Technical Area 21 near the Laboratory's northeastern boundary. The fuel was regarded as "missing" by the Laboratory because there were no immediate signs of a diesel fuel leak after a routine inspection of the tank showed that the tank was nearly empty.

The above-ground tank held diesel fuel for the TA-21 Steam Plant in the event of a loss of the natural gas fuel supply to the plant. After determining the fuel was missing, Laboratory personnel thoroughly inspected the underground

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TA-21 Diesel spill, above ground storage tank, core holes



pipe that carried the fuel from the tank to the backup generator at the steam plant. They eventually found pinhole-sized leaks in some sections of the pipe that were the result of corrosion. Laboratory personnel dug shallow potholes below areas of leaky pipe, but still could not find evidence of significant amounts of diesel in soil samples taken from the holes.

The Laboratory hired an independent contractor who specializes in locating fuel leaks to drill more core holes in the TA-21 Steam Plant vicinity. By drilling nearly two dozen shallow core holes and 10 deep core holes, the contractor was able to uncover evidence of sizeable amounts of diesel fuel in the tuff formation below the surface.

The drilling has shown that diesel fuel has seeped into the mesa top to a depth of nearly 160 feet. The below-ground plume does not appear to be discharging into any nearby canyons, environmentally sensitive areas or groundwater, and does not pose an immediate threat to human health.

The actual amount of fuel that leaked from the tank remains unknown. Preliminary calculations based on diesel fuel concentrations in soil throughout the spill area indicate that the spill most likely involves at least several thousand gallons. Crews are refining calculations to get a more precise estimate of the extent of the leak.

Officials with the NMED and EPA have been regularly apprised of the situation and the on-going investigation. NMED personnel have regularly visited the site since the incident was reported.

The Laboratory is soliciting bids for remediation of the area. Laboratory officials hope to have remediation activities underway in the near future. Since a cleanup contract has not yet been awarded, the chosen remediation method for cleaning up the diesel fuel is not yet known, but officials are committed to a thorough cleanup. Several remediation methods are available.

TA-21 is the site of many former Laboratory operations dating back to the Cold War, but relatively few employees work there now. The Laboratory's Environmental Restoration Project has characterized most of TA-21, and a large number of buildings and facilities associated with former Laboratory operations have been demolished and removed. The technical area is located at the end of DP Road in the Los Alamos townsite area.

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*Last Modified: Tuesday, 24-Sep-2002 12:52:17 MDT*  
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