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## DOE Wants Nuke-Trash Incinerator at Lab

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### Proposed \$3 Million Unit To Burn Only Low-Level Debris

The U.S. Department of Energy this month applied for state permission to build an incinerator to burn 3.6 million pounds of low-level radioactive trash each year at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

The lab currently buries such trash and needs the incinerator to cut down on volume, lab environmental scientist Donna Lacombe said Tuesday. She said the agency will control the burning with special filters to keep emissions within standards.

Lacombe said the planned incinerator could be built within five years at a cost of about \$3 million. She said it would only burn items from Los Alamos that have been exposed to radioactivity — not inherently radioactive substances.

The incinerator isn't intended to burn any of the same material that the DOE wants to store underground at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant near Carlsbad, Lacombe said. She said the department plans to isolate more highly radioactive

material for burial at WIPP.

The DOE still hasn't determined what to do with the ash, which remains radioactive, Lacombe said. She said the laboratory already has state permission to operate a small incinerator to burn radioactive waste but said it's been idle for two years.

The DOE got state permission last June to burn nearly 100 tons of non-radioactive garbage a day at an incinerator in Los Alamos County.

Robert Kirkpatrick, the state En-

vironmental Improvement Division engineer handling DOE's application for the radioactive incinerator, predicted Tuesday the project will attract a lot of public attention.

"You think that a garbage incinerator causes a lot of controversy, wait until the public hears about an incinerator that's burning radiological and hazardous material," he said.

Bill Blankenship, an environmental specialist at EID responsible for drafting the incinerator regulations

required by the new law, agreed. He speculated the new application will be "one of the most controversial items worked on here, and it should be."

The DOE applied to the EID for permission to operate the new incinerator on May 3. However, EID workers said Tuesday they have done little work on the application.

The Legislature passed a law this spring prohibiting disposal of solid waste by incineration until state regulators draft and adopt stringent

discharge emission limits.

Louis Rose, lawyer with the State Health and Environment Department which oversees the EID, said Tuesday the new state law perhaps would allow the EID to issue an incinerator permit. However, he said the law plainly prohibits actual operation of an incinerator until the state adopts the new standards.

Rose said the EID may be ready to propose draft regulations in the next few months and said the State Environmental Improvement Board

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## N-Trash Incinerator Permit Sought

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may act on them by the end of the year.

Kirkpatrick, the EID environmental engineer responsible for reviewing the incinerator application, said Tuesday he is inclined to wait until the state adopts its new regulations before reviewing the application.

The garbage incinerator that won state approval last year was intended to replace a 38-year-old steam generating plant which pro-

vides heat for lab buildings.

Although the DOE's application for the garbage incinerator last year was successful, it drew much public attention to the condition of state regulations. The new state law requiring stringent regulations is the result.

Rep. Max Coll, D-Santa Fe, sponsored the bill to require new regulations. "I wanted to see a good set of regulations in effect before we bought off on incinerators wholesale," he said Tuesday. "I

hope that we put some really good regulations in place to protect the state."

The DOE's planned garbage incinerator apparently is on hold. Harold Valencia, area manager for the DOE in Albuquerque, said several construction companies submitted bids on the garbage incinerator project last month. He said all the companies wanted more than his office wanted to pay.

Valencia said many of the com-

panies apparently jacked up their bids to cover the unknown cost of meeting the new state regulations when they go into effect. He said the DOE probably will postpone putting the garbage incinerator project out to bids again until the new state regulations come out.

Although Valencia declined to say how much the DOE wanted to spend on the garbage incinerator, other department officials last year said they expected getting the plant into operation would cost \$7.6 million.

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