

Final Decision on Los

JOURNAL NORTH / FRIDAY / JUNE 16, 1989

Alamos Incinerator Due in July

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New Mexico's Environmental Improvement Division will decide next month whether to give final approval to a Los Alamos National Laboratory incinerator that already has interim state and federal permission to burn radioactive and hazardous waste.

C. Kelley Crossman, supervisor of the EID's hazardous waste bureau, said this week the incinerator has passed controlled burn tests. "There is no doubt in my mind that this incinerator, as

it's designed and operated, meets all the standards as they exist," he said.

The state Legislature passed a law this year prohibiting disposal of solid waste by incineration until the state adopts discharge emission limits. However, the law exempts the Los Alamos incinerator and others submitted to the EID before the start of the year.

The U.S. Department of Energy built the incinerator early this decade to conduct experiments on the efficiency of incineration of mixed radioactive and hazardous waste. For the last two years, the

incinerator has sat idle.

"It was a test vehicle that they started adding to," Crossman said. "To make use of a tool that was sitting there idle, they started adding some things." He said the incinerator was originally designed to burn for short periods but that it is being upgraded to operate for long stretches.

The incinerator can burn about 100 pounds of waste an hour, Crossman said. He said the resulting ash must be buried elsewhere at a proper hazardous waste plant.

The July 18 hearing at the Harold Runnels Building auditorium will begin at 9 a.m. The EID will only consider the hazardous waste aspect of the incinerator, while the federal Environmental Protection Agency will decide after that whether it meets federal standards concerning radioactivity.

Harold Valencia, area manager for the DOE in Los Alamos, said on Wednesday that his office is in the process of selecting a scientist from the lab to answer questions about the incinerator. Someone else from the DOE will attend

the hearing to answer questions about the administrative process, he said.

Valencia said he's confident the incinerator is safe and will get state and federal approval. "When we request for an incinerator, we have the wherewithal to meet all the standards set up by the EPA

and the state," he said.

The DOE last month applied for state permission to build a new incinerator to burn mixed radioactive and hazardous waste. Bruce Nicholson of state EID wrote to the federal agency this month stating his agency won't consider the application until the new state regulations are in place.

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