

Comments on the Los Alamos Draft Permit:
Incinerator and Site Clean-up
EPA Hearings of August 7, 8, 1989

My name is Barbara Dreisbach-Towle. I am a student of Environmental Biology, and a small business owner, here in Santa Fe.

The incinerators at Los Alamos are excluded from this hearing, and I'd like you to know that I am aware of that. However, since I wish the incinerators eliminated from this permit, may the public record to show that, they, and the site clean-up are better handled in a separate manner for the following reason: Air is the number one need of our bodies, and therefore worthy of more urgent attention. Then water follows in importance, then food. Each of us have options when the ground and water are polluted. We buy organic crops and H2O in bottles, a simple and costly procedure. However, in the case of air pollution, expensive and difficult alternatives are available. We can only wear oxygen tanks and/or gas masks.

In Module VIII there are many good suggestions for site clean-up and the EPA may have an honest and genuine concern for our fragile environment. These are a few items I would like to see added to the proposed permit:

1. First of all, Los Alamos National Laboratory is left too much on their own supervision. The main cause of the mess is that very reason. Even Admiral Watkins states that, quote, "we are the enemy". (MacNeill/Lehrer, Wednesday, August 2, 1989; KNME). There must be an independent monitoring of ALL the items listed in Module VIII by scientists versed in each particular prose.
2. The EPA needs to petition the federal government to immediately take action on the radioactive portion at LANL, or request the Atomic Energy Act be repealed, and its power given over to the EPA for immediate action.
3. A recommendation issued by your office to our Governor, the EID, and our Attorney General, that they adopt the additional SAWA regulations of 1984 to the RCRA facility workplan, would be of benefit to New Mexican citizens. I ask for these radical notions as I believe the EPA is meant to protect the environment, and needs to use every tool at its command.
4. In response to an eight-year investigation time I suggest that your directors request more manpower. If the governing body responds that funds are short, ask them to quit building bombs, since we have plenty already, and give you the money instead.
5. The emergency event notification of 15 days to the EPA, from LANL is much too long. It takes only 20 minutes or less, by



0274
Permit

air, for their contaminants to reach Santa Fe proper. How long does it take to reach San Idiefonso Pueblo, or Taos? A hotline response is more appropriate with these obvious conditions.

6. To reduce the volume of waste; microbes, which love to munch on this stuff, recycling through plants and supercompaction come to mind. If we can get into outer space, then technology can be born to assist in this dire project.

It has been said that the incinerator will be absent in this waste reduction, but I find that hard to believe. So, I feel compelled to add that none of this hazardous material be incinerated.

7. The University of California must receive a penalty. I suggest the maximum amount allowable, for their interest in the desecration of New Mexican land and water. Perhaps, then, they will be more aware of their shining institution.

8. Since the cancer rate is up for the city of Los Alamos, and as more of the citizens and laboratory workers are aware of dangers involved in their little corner of the world, a "Whistleblower's '800' Number" needs to be posted on every bulletin board in the laboratory complex and in the local newspaper.

9. Since the EPA has jurisdiction over mixed waste streams, it is my desire that all 1300-1800 other dump sites be inspected to detect even the smallest amount of hazardous waste that may be mixed with the radioactive portions, and appropriate decisions made as to their final fate.

10. In the arena of public relations, it is obvious the public gain more directive control in the decision-making at LANL. The "National Security" excuse is responsible for the poison in our land, takes away our security and, in fact, creates insecurity. Many of us are no longer afraid of terrorists or other forms of foreign aggression. Our own government is the terrorist and aggressor, with by-products of perilous living conditions and nightmares.

A panel of independent scientists, an environmental group and local Indians, distinct from state and federal agencies, to watch, and/or intervene when necessary is feasible. Of course, this panel contacts the public on a regular basis, through environmental groups and a mailing list of interested parties.

Thank you for the opportunity to input ideas in this most important decision. I sincerely hope that your awareness and positive action for the earth continues to grow.

NEWS

Whistle-blowers say bosses sent them to psychiatrists

N.Y. Times News Service

At least four workers who complained about safety and environmental problems at four military nuclear plants run for the government by private contractors say they were ordered by their superiors to see psychiatrists or psychologists.

The workers and their lawyer all say that they believe the orders came as retaliation for the allegations they made. In two highly publicized cases the allegations against the contractors were confirmed; in the others, they have been denied.

Each of the workers says that the implication that they were suffering from mental problems was part of a long campaign of harassment that included such tactics as demotions, ridicule in front of co-workers and threats to revoke the security clearances that are required for their jobs.

Three went to the psychologist or psychiatrists at least once; one refused but fears retaliation for his refusal.

All of the companies deny having ordered the use of health professionals inappropriately.

Workers who have made public allegations of wrongdoing by the government and its contractors have complained for years that they have been punished for calling attention to problems.

The has previously acknowledged to Congress that it has done a poor job of protecting such whistle-blowers in the plants it owns.

A spokesman for the Department of Energy, Philip Keif, said last month that a response was being prepared to allegations that the department and its contracts are retaliating against employees by referring them to mental health professionals.

"Obviously, we don't employ a policy to harass in such a way," he said.

Thomas Carpenter, a lawyer representing the four workers, complained about the referrals in a letter on July 13 to James Watkins, the secretary of energy.

"The use of psychiatric fitness-for-duty examinations in whatever context essentially has been retaliatory,

punishing dissidents by labeling them mentally incapable of service to their country," wrote Carpenter, who is with a lobby group, the Government Accountability Project.

He said the tactic was intended to damage the employees' careers and "sense of self-worth."

One of the employees is Edwin Bricker, who operates equipment processing nuclear materials at the Hanford nuclear reservation in Washington State.

He said his sessions with two psychologists included such questions as "how do you feel about your fellow workers, your employer, and do certain things tick you off?"

Bricker told congressional investigators several years ago that in preparation for a tour of Hanford by Gov. Booth Gardner of Washington, he and another worker were ordered to remove contractors' signs warning that an area was contaminated. His assertion was later substantiated.

Bricker has also made scores of other complaints, saying fires went unreported, a control room was left unattended or staffed by unqualified personnel, and compartments for handling plutonium that were supposed to be sealed had loose windows. Those complaints were rejected by the contractors.

He said he suffered a variety of retaliations, including a physical assault by a fellow worker and being assigned to pick up cigarette butts.

A spokesman for the Westinghouse Electric Corp., which operates Hanford, said that Bricker had in fact been harassed by fellow workers, who feared the attention to the problems might result in the plant being shut and their jobs being lost, but the spokesman said that the company had done everything it could to avert such harassment.

The Westinghouse spokesman, L.B. Moore, said because Bricker has health problems, including a condition that prevents him from wearing protective clothing needed in radiation areas, he could do were limited.

"He may indeed have been put on a clean bill of health," he said.

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