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Permit



Incinerator hearing

Bryan Welch

Environmentalists fear incinerator

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Staff Writer

Local opponents to Los Alamos National laboratories' plan to burn nuclear waste in an incinerator there confronted officials of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in Taos Aug. 2 and discovered that many of their fears were not to be relieved.

Neither the state nor federal governments have regulations for monitoring the radioactive emissions of the incinerator which, if approved, will burn both hazardous chemical and radioactive waste.

Although the federal Clean Air Act sets standards for the airborne radioactivity at the laboratory's border, EPA officials say the new permit will not bring any new monitoring procedures to Los Alamos.

Now, airborne contaminants from the

laboratories are measured by the Department of Energy and the University of California, operators of Los Alamos.

And the \$2 billion price tag for cleaning up between 1,300 and 1,800 pockets of hazardous waste in and around the laboratories will be paid by the taxpayer as part of the permit.

The cleanup does not qualify for superfund money or independent monitoring because it is not classified as an "imminent hazard," based on the evaluation of the DOE.

The new permit will require the laboratories to monitor the incinerator's emissions of other hazardous substances.

Although the new permit is being issued by New Mexico's Environmental Improvement Division, the EPA has "oversight authority," according to Bill

Gallagher, chief of the EPA's hazardous waste permitting office in Dallas. So the federal agency scheduled the question-and-answer session in Taos.

He admitted federal regulations could be stiffer for facilities like the incinerator, and that the exemption of nuclear residues from incineration are a particular sore spot.

"I think that's a problem, but that's what we're stuck with," Gallagher said.

Taos environmentalist David Bates was particularly critical of the Department of Energy. "DOE's response to the people's demands for documentation has been totally inadequate," he said. "We don't trust the DOE. We don't feel there's cause for trust."

"We don't trust (Los Alamos) any further than we do Dow Chemical or Dupont," Gallagher told the Taos crowd.

