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From: Dave McCoy [dave@radfreenm.org]

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To: dave@radfreenm.org

Subject: FW: Citizen Action Press Release: NMED orders well replacement at Sandia Mixed Waste Landfill

N E W S R E L E A S E

Date: August 16, 2007

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New Mexico Environment Department Orders Replacement of 3 Monitoring Wells at Sandia National Laboratories' Mixed Waste Landfill and Issues Notice of Disapproval

The New Mexico Environment Department has issued an order for replacement for two additional monitoring wells and found deficiencies in Sandia's plan for the replacement of the background water monitoring well that was ordered to be replaced earlier.

The waste dump, known as the Mixed Waste Landfill, contains over an estimated 700,000 cubic ft. of radioactive and hazardous waste disposed of in unlined pits and trenches over a 30-year period. The dump is located along a 10 mile boundary with the City of Albuquerque and adjacent to the Mesa del Sol, a residential development with plans to drill a series of wells to supply drinking water for 80,000 future residents.

The new monitoring wells were ordered after the Environment Department found that the water level in the background well too low to be properly sampled was not in an appropriate location. The wells had stainless steel screens and were "suffering from corrosion to such a degree that the wells can no longer produce water samples that are representative of aquifer conditions..."

Robert H. Gilkeson, a groundwater expert and geological scientist formerly employed by Los Alamos National Laboratory, began informing the Environment Department in May of 2006 that the wells installed at the Cold War-era waste dump are not in compliance with federal and state regulations. Gilkeson has recommended that 6 out of the 7 monitoring wells at the Mixed Waste dump need to be replaced.

Instead of cleaning up the waste the NMED has issued a permit to Sandia to cover the dump with 3 ft. of dirt -despite Sandia's predictions that a cancer-causing solvent known as PCE will seep into Albuquerque's drinking water by the year 2010. Gilkeson maintains that the monitoring wells have never furnished reliable water quality data to support leaving the radioactive and hazardous wastes in place under a dirt cover.

Gilkeson informed the Environment Department that the wells installed at the Mixed Waste Landfill were constructed in a way that can actually "hide" contaminants – instead of detect contaminants that may have already reached the ground water. He also called Sandia's sampling procedures "deficient" in that they do not provide an accurate assessment of the presence and degree of contamination. Gilkeson concluded that Sandia's proposed monitoring program for the dump would not guarantee protection of the groundwater at the present time or over the long-term.

Gilkeson cited similar problems with the network of monitoring wells installed at waste sites at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). Recent reports by the Department of Energy (DOE) Inspector General, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the National Academies of Science (NAS) support Gilkeson's concerns for the monitoring wells at LANL. After the ten-year period of well approvals by the Environment Department, the NAS noted that "most or all of monitoring wells at LANL" are not reliable for detection of contaminants. This resulted in over \$150,000,000 of costs to taxpayers with appropriate monitoring still not in place.

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Other deficiencies in Sandia's long-term plan for the dump were cited by Peter Robinson, Research Director for the Southwest Research and Information Center. In addition to supporting Gilkeson's recommendations, Robinson asked the NMED to defer placing the dirt cover on the dump until Sandia installs new monitoring wells, institutes a more comprehensive sampling program for the entire range of contaminants released at the dump, and replaces old sampling data with new data to verify predictions that PCE will reach the ground water when Sandia says it will.

Citizen Action's Director, Dave McCoy, stated: "We are encouraged to see the Environment Department move toward well monitoring replacement at the Mixed Waste dump. We are also asking for inclusion of the public in the long-term well monitoring planning. We are asking that these dangerous wastes be ordered excavated as the only way to protect Albuquerque's drinking water supplies for public health. Sandia scientists claimed in the 1990s that the wastes in another dump at Sandia, known as the Chemical Waste Landfill, would take 360 years to reach the aquifer. Yet, it took less than 20 years for TCE from the dump to reach the groundwater. The now excavated Chemical Waste Landfill (CWL) also lacks a reliable well monitoring system. The plan for the well monitoring at the CWL is out for public comment with an August 20 deadline.

Janet Greenwald, Director for Citizens for Alternatives to Radioactive Dumping (CARD) said, "The deficiencies found in the monitoring wells and sampling procedures for waste sites at both Sandia and LANL raise serious questions about the state's and the labs' ability to adequately protect the water resources of New Mexico. Why should the Environment Department wait to order excavation of wastes until after they have shown up in our drinking water?"

See the *Citizen Action* and CARD websites at: www.radfreenm.org. and www.cardnm.org

CARD and Citizen Action are projects of the New Mexico Community Foundation.

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