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## Groups ready to fight dump proposal

► *'Triassic Park' east of Roswell would be state's first hazardous waste dump, but activists say New Mexico has enough toxic waste*

By KRISTEN DAVENPORT  
The New Mexican

Santa Fe environmental groups are gearing up to fight a proposed hazardous-waste dump 40 miles east of Roswell that has been dubbed "Triassic Park."

Gandy-Marley Inc., a company based in Texas and southeastern New Mexico, is proposing to build a disposal and treatment facility over a square mile that would accept hazardous materials from across the nation — PCBs, lead, mercury, strychnine and byproducts of

the petroleum industry. The site also would accept waste from American companies working in countries south of the border.

The dump would not be allowed to accept radioactive contamination, however. If approved by the New Mexico Environment Department, the disposal area would be the first hazardous-waste dump in New Mexico. Hundreds exist in other states.

The proposed facility would be buried in rock beds formed during the Triassic period, about 210 million years ago. Gandy-Marley officials say the area is good for a hazardous-waste dump

because no aquifer exists there and thick layers of rock would hold disposal bins in place and keep them from leaking.

But some environmentalists — both in southeastern New Mexico and Santa Fe — say the state shouldn't approve the disposal site because New Mexico has enough toxic waste already, including the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant not far from the proposed Triassic Park. WIPP accepts only defense-related radioactive waste.

Also, environmentalists say, allowing

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the hazardous-waste dump could open the site to possibly accepting low-level radioactive waste when the nation desperately needs a place to put spent nuclear fuel from nuclear-power plants.

"That whole corner of the state, we're calling it the toxic mall," said Joni Arends, director of Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety, a Santa Fe environmental group. "They're calling it Triassic Park, but this is a toxic dump, not an amusement park."

The Santa Fe environmental groups, including CCNS, Los Alamos Study Group and Citizens for Alternatives to Radioactive Dumping, are working with one of the only environmental organizations, Conservative Use of

Resources and Environment, in the southeastern part of New Mexico to fight the dump.

Deborah Reade, with CARD in Santa Fe, said the groups are worried the dump will adversely affect the lifestyle of ranchers and farmers in the area. Also, she said, the Audobon Society has come forward to complain the area is habitat for the lesser prairie chicken, a bird with declining populations that has nesting areas on the site.

"They said, 'Don't worry. We're going to build in (protection),' but this is a lot of noise and noxious who-knows-what. It's a big proposed facility," Reade said.

Gandy-Marley already runs two petroleum landfarms at the site. A landfarm is a site where petroleum or other toxic sludge is spread

across the ground and micro-organisms are encouraged to break down the toxic chemicals.

Steve Pullen, with the state Environment Department's hazardous-waste bureau, is in charge of issuing draft permits for Triassic Park. Pullen said the site would be permitted to accept "a very long list of chemicals and compounds."

Largely, he said, the waste would come from the petroleum industry and high-tech industry in New Mexico and elsewhere. Also, waste would come from environmental cleanup operations in New Mexico.

The Environment Department's responsibility, he said, is to make sure Gandy-Marley obeys New Mexico hazardous-waste regulations.

"We have to make sure the applicant (Gandy-Marley)

addresses all those regulations — how they are going to handle the waste, what will happen when the facility closes, plus hydrology and geology issues," Pullen said.

Pullen said the Environment Department had drafted a permit; now, the dump proposal must go before the public. Environment Secretary Pete Maggiore will make the final decision.

Pullen said the disposal site probably would not open New Mexico to having another area that would accept radioactive and nuclear wastes, as environmentalists fear. However, he said, the federal government decides what happens to radioactive wastes, not the state.

And, he said, the public

should know that Triassic Park would be different from any old dump on the edge of town.

"They are storing contaminated waste and treating it, as well as disposing of it," he said. "I think the public is generally unaware of how comprehensive New Mexico's hazardous-waste regulations are. It is in my opinion the ... most protective set of regulations anywhere in the world. People think it's like the county dump on the edge of town, but it's far more controlled than that."

The first public-information meeting will take place in Santa Fe at 6:30 p.m. Monday at the state land office. More meetings will be held in Roswell, Tatum and Hagerman next week.