DOE decision on waste to benefit LANL

Los Alamos Monitor 2-29-00

Monitor Staff Report

A final decision announced by the U.S. Department of Energy on Friday will have a positive impact the treatment of "legacy low-level waste" and its disposal at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

The decision, announced in a DOE news release, states that the ruling now "enables the department to move forward with the closure of former defense facilities and redirect millions of dollars now being spent on waste storage back into actual cleanup work."

The decision is the result of two years of study and discussion, according to the news release, and specifically addresses the treatment and disposal of low-level waste (LLW) and mixed low-level waste. Low-level waste is unwanted radioactive waste created in the process of handling and use of radioactive substances, and mixed low-level waste is low-level radioactive waste that also contains hazardous materials.

The ruling will have an impact at nuclear complexes across the DOE, but may prove to be especially beneficial at LANL, said James Nunz, waste management program manager at the DOE Los Alamos Area Office.

"It will have a huge positive impact for the DOE as a whole," Nunz said. "But particularly, opens up several good possibilities for Los Alamos."

For LLW treatment, the DOE will "continue the practice of each site treating its own waste," according to the news release. The DOE also will continue the disposal of onsite waste at sites that already have LLW disposal facilities, such as the Hanford, Idaho, LANL, the Nevada Test Site, Oak Ridge, and Savannah River.

(Please see WASTE, Page 8)

WASTE

(from Page 1)

It further states that DOE will continue to use Hanford and Nevada Test Site for LLW disposal from other DOE sites that do not have disposal capacity.

For the treatment of MLLW, the DOE will continue to use Hanford, Idaho and Oak Ridge to treat waste from other DOE sites and will begin to use Savannah River as well. For MLLW disposal, the DOE has decided to begin using disposal facilities already constructed at the Hanford and Nevada sites for off-site waste.

This change will allow LANL to utilize other DOE sites and their treatment technologies for the disposal of LLW and MLLW, Nunz explained. It can now utilize the Oak Ridge Site for its PCB Capacity; the Savannah River site for its Defense Incinerator and Controlled Air Incinerator; and the Hanford Site for accepting the mixed low-level waste.

In the past, LANL has utilized a private waste disposal company, Envirocar in Clive, Utah, and the laboratory has sometimes paid "premium prices" for the services, Nunz said.

It also has cost LANL more money, because shipments to Envirocar have been smaller, and the company has also charged the laboratory additional fees for the size of its shipments.

The changes are predicted to save the DOE costs in surveillance, disposal, treatment technology, equipment, and personnel.

Nunz said the decision would also move DOE and LANL ahead of schedule on its "Site Treatment Plan," which was documented in 1995.

"It will make a huge impact on the environment in Los Alamos and a huge impact on public environmental safety in general," Nunz added.