

THE SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN

JULY 25, 2008

FRIDAY

5

Realtors sue over 'Robin Hood' fee

Lawsuit aims to kill transfer tax before special election

By Julie Ann Grimm
The New Mexican

A local real-estate industry group launched another attack Thursday against efforts by city leaders to tax high-end home sales.

A state District Court lawsuit filed on behalf of the Santa Fe Association

of Realtors and three property owners aims to thwart the tax before voters have a chance to weigh it in a special election scheduled for March.

The City Council decided last month to put the proposal to a vote, asking for permission to levy a 1 percent fee the portion of a home sale that exceeds \$750,000. For an \$800,000 home, for

example, the fee would be \$500. If a majority of voters approve, the proceeds from the tax would help create housing for people who work in the city, and the city would be the first in the state to enact such a measure.

But Attorney Karl Sommer argues in the court complaint that the tax is not authorized under state law because

the conveyance of property is a product or service, the only persons named in the state statute allow such a tax.

The Realtors association, which helped pay for thousands of radio and newspaper ads to

Please see FEE, Page



Photo courtesy Katie Mehrer

Guru Sant Singh Khalsa of Sombriillo says he was arrested during a televised police sting in India while searching for a wife.

Desire

Going to market



Bernadette Pflfo and her husband, Raul Goler, below, of Ranchos de Taos move a bulto of Nuestro Señor de Esquipulas into Santa María de la Paz on Wednesday in preparation for the 57th annual Spanish Market being held Saturday and Sunday on the Plaza. The market features handcrafted traditional arts by 250 local Hispanic artists, music and regional foods. Left, A Last Supper woodcarving by Peter Ortega.

For more information on Spanish Market, visit www.newmexicanmagazines.com.

LANL

Paper reveals toxins

080731.5





Bernadette Pifio and her husband, Raul Goler, below, of Ranchos de Taos move a bulto of Nuestro Señor de Esquipulas into Santa María de la Paz on Wednesday in preparation for the 57th annual Spanish Market being held Saturday and Sunday on the Plaza. The market features handcrafted traditional arts by 250 local Hispanic artists, music and regional foods. Left, A Last Supper woodcarving by Peter Ortega. For more information on Spanish Market, visit www.newmexicanmagazines.com.

Photos by Luis Sánchez Saturno
The New Mexican



DULE 10 a.m.: Exhibición de Modas by La Sociedad Folklorica, Plaza Stage
10:30 a.m.: Paella making at The Spanish Table, 109 N. Guadalupe St.
11 a.m.: Mucho Corazón, Plaza Stage
Noon: María Benítez Dance Company — The Next Generation, Plaza Stage
12:30 p.m.: Paella making

at The Spanish Table, 109 N. Guadalupe St.
1 p.m.: Qwest presentation
1:15 p.m.: Esteban, Plaza Stage
2:30 p.m.: Chuy Martinez and Oti Ruiz, Plaza Stage
3:30 p.m.: Ivon Ulibarri and Café Mocha, Plaza Stage
SUNDAY
8 a.m.: Spanish Market Mass, St. Francis Cathedral

Basilica
9 a.m.: Spanish Market opens; The Quintana Sisters, Plaza Stage
10 a.m.: Mariachi Paisano del Valle, Plaza Stage
11 a.m.: Awards ceremony, Plaza Stage
Noon: Cielo, Plaza Stage
1:30 p.m.: Manzanares, Plaza Stage
3 p.m.: Esteban, Plaza Stage

Suit over voter registration law

is a real shame currently has this it's going to hiny Weiser, direc and Elections at for Justice. enting four civic stration law puts ve who want to

register people. Under the law, groups may only obtain 50 registration forms at one time. They also must turn registration forms into a county clerk within 48 hours. "This really flies in the face of some core democratic principles," said Weiser, also an attorney in

the case. James Flores, spokesman for the Secretary of State's Office, said his office hadn't seen the lawsuit Thursday and couldn't comment. Richardson spokesman Allan Oliver said the governor hasn't studied

Please see **HIT**, Page A-8

Papers reveal toxins posed risk to public

Plutonium contamination estimates rise through historic document study

By Sue Vorenberg
The New Mexican

POJOAQUE — Potential contamination levels from airborne plutonium and other substances at Los Alamos National Laboratory paint an increasingly scary health picture for those that lived on the hill in the lab's early history, according to historic documents declassified in a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention project.

The Los Alamos Historical Document Retrieval and Assessment Project, sponsored by the CDC, has been studying and declassifying documents related to contaminant releases at the lab for the past nine years. CDC will eventually look at all of the gathered data and decide what kind of action needs to be taken regarding health concerns.

Over the past several months, investigators found that sites on a small portion of the lab between 1948 and 1955 released more than 80 times the amount of airborne plutonium than the lab had originally estimated.

The total for those sites was 58 curies of plutonium, compared with the 0.724 curies the lab originally reported in the early '50s, said Tom Widner, a health scientist leading the LAHDRA project.

A curie is an amount of radioactive material that gives off 37 billion radioactive particles, or rays, per second.

And there are many other parts of the lab that could have added more curies of plutonium to that number in a time when record-keeping and monitoring were sketchy at best, he said.

"It looks like the total releases could go well above 58 curies," Widner said Wednesday night at a public meeting and progress report on the LAHDRA project in Pojoaque.

Please see **TOXINS**, Page A-7

Toxins: People in area might have eaten contaminated vegetables

Continued from Page A-1

The 58 curies were released at a part of the lab that was about two-thirds of a mile away from a trailer park area where scientists and other workers lived, he added. "People in Los Alamos lived closer to the operations than any Department of Energy site we've looked at," said Widner, who has worked on similar studies at other DOE labs with ChemRisk, a San Francisco company.

If plutonium is inhaled or eaten, it can cause cancer and other diseases. And beyond people in the area potentially breathing the substance, it appears they also may have eaten contaminated garden vegetables, he said.

"We know there was produce available from gardens in town at that time," Widner said. "There was even a garden contest put on by Zia Corp. (an early lab contractor)."

Translating the curies of radioactive material released by the lab into actual health problems is a tricky business, though, and the LAHDRA project isn't set up to figure that out.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, which sponsors the project, may do that eventually, said Charles Miller, who heads the CDC's Radiation Studies Branch.

To get some idea of the contamination, consider that naturally occurring radioactivity in the body is responsible for about 0.25 curies per person per year.

But curies don't necessarily translate into radiation doses, or rads, which measure radioactive energy absorbed by tissue. Nor do they translate into rems and millirems, which are calculations of the radiation dose coupled with the impact on human health.

As for millirems, the annual average dose from background radiation in the environment and from other sources is about 360 mrems per year, and the body's natural radioactivity is

Plutonium isn't the only substance that seeped into the air from the lab in those days. Beryllium is another element of concern that was used frequently and without much monitoring in LANL's early history.

that can damage the lungs and increase the risk of cancer.

The lab used to fire explosive shots of beryllium from a cannon to test the material's properties, Widner said.

But information about beryllium releases at the lab have been hard to get, due to staff turnover at Los Alamos in some key areas where documents are managed, Miller said. "We've received no documents that we've requested since February," he said.

That problem has slowed down the overall goals of the LAHDRA project, which was supposed to have finished its document retrieval process by September, he added. "That's not going to happen by September, now I'll be happy if we can finish by the end of December," Miller said.

Another area of concern is public exposure to radioactive material around the Trinity site, where the first atomic bomb was tested at White Sands Missile Range on July 16, 1945, Widner said.

"Some people think of the area around Trinity as desolate, but there were a number of people living around there at that time," he said, adding 68 ranches and camps and 15 towns were within 30 miles of the explosion.

The areas with people that were most affected were the town of Bingham and Hot Owl Canyon, which were downwind, he said.

Looking at a fallout map, some contamination also spread into the larger town of Socorro.

Residents were not warned.

collected rain water from their rooftops to use as drinking water, and there were also nearby ranching operations and dairy operations that could have led to ingestion of radioactive materials, he said.

Earlier in the data-gathering process, documents indicated residents also may have consumed contaminated goat milk at that time, but it turned out a goat farm in the area was used to produce wool rather than milk, which is at least a small bit of good news, Widner said.

A final area of concern that has come out of the document search is the airborne release of tritium, a radioactive isotope of hydrogen used in nuclear weapons work, he said.

LANL has received large quantities of tritium from Oak Ridge National Laboratory since 1944, but there is little data about releases until much later, he said. "It's a big unknown before 1967," Widner said.

Widner expects to release a summarized progress report next month or so, since the slowdown of data gathering has delayed his yearly report, he said.

Funds for continuation of the \$10 million project are running short, and extending the data gathering process beyond December doesn't seem possible, Miller said.

The final report should be issued in mid-2009, followed by a period of professional review and public comments. After that, the CDC will determine what actions will follow, he said.

Contact Sue Vorenberg at

IN POLICY TRANSLATE INTO TALKS
 an allirems, which are cal-
 culations of the radiation dose
 coupled with the impact on
 human health.

As for millirems, the annual
 average dose from background
 radiation in the environment
 and from other sources is about
 360 mrems per year, and the
 body's natural radioactivity is
 about 25 mrems per year.

In a plug-and-play computer
 model at Sandia National Labo-
 ratories, health physicist Ted
 Simmons did a rough calcula-
 tion for *The New Mexican* of a
 56 curie plutonium-239 release,
 all at once, blowing in the same
 direction to a population two-
 thirds of a mile away.

In that scenario, those living
 in the trailer area would have
 been exposed to 280,000 mil-
 lirems, or 280 rems, Simmons
 said.

Doses of 500,000 millirems,
 or 500 rems, are generally fatal
 within a few weeks.

Still, with the 58 curies of
 plutonium spread out through
 the air around the lab, it's hard
 to tell what landed where, how
 much of it ended up being
 ingested by residents and what
 the rem dose actually was, Wid-
 ner said.

But that's certainly a topic
 that could use a closer look,
 he said. "Airborne plutonium
 releases warrant an investiga-
 tion more detailed than our
 preliminary screening," Widner
 said.

Plutonium isn't the only
 substance that seeped into
 the air from the lab in those
 days. Beryllium is another ele-
 ment of concern that was used
 frequently and without much
 monitoring in LANL's early his-
 tory.

"It certainly could be a hazard
 for workers," Widner said. "But
 in our knowledge, it hasn't been
 addressed as a potential health
 hazard" for the surrounding
 area.

One lab estimate indicated
 that 1,224 kilograms, or about
 2,698 pounds, of beryllium
 was used in testing at the lab
 through 1997, he added.

Beryllium is a toxic chemical

towns were within 30 miles of
 the explosion.

The areas with people that
 were most affected were the
 town of Bingham and Hot Owl
 Canyon, which were downwind,
 he said.

Looking at a fallout map,
 some contamination also spread
 into the larger town of Socorro.

"Residents were not warned,
 not surprisingly so because
 of the secrecy of the project,"
 Widner said. "But even after the
 bombing of Japan, there was no
 warning, and fallout snowed
 down on the area for several
 days."

At that time, many residents

data gathering process beyond
 December doesn't seem pos-
 sible, Miller said.

The final report should be
 issued in mid-2009, followed by
 a period of professional review
 and public comments. After
 that, the CDC will determine
 what actions will follow, he said.

Contact Sue Vorenberg at
 svorenberg@sfnewmexican.com.

home-delivery

986-3010 • 1-800-873-3372

(outside SF)

THE SAVER OF
NEW MEXICAN

Illness Forces Auction

200 Calle San Simon in Sol y Lomas

Approximately 2400 sq. ft. with
 3 bedrooms & 2 car garage on 1 acre

Great Opportunity for Contractor

Open House Dates:

Sunday July 6, 13, 20 & 27, 1:00 PM to 4:00 PM

Auction Thursday July 31 at 11:00 AM

Opening Minimum Bid \$369,000

10% Buyer's Premium

Call 505.699.2360

Directions: Take Old Pecos Trail to Rodeo to Calle Tablas to Calle San Simon

TRY BEFORE YOU BUY!

**TOYOTA
 Rent a Car**

- Daily, weekly and monthly rentals
- Flexible plans and competitive rates
- Great selection of Toyota's latest models.

It's not just a rental,
 it's a Toyota

Rent the ALL NEW
2009 COROLLA
 For only **\$33.95**
PER DAY

28/CITY
 37/HIGHWAY MPG

CALL TOLL FREE: 1-888-272-1282

BEAVER TOYOTA

1500 ST. MICHAELS DR.

TOYOTA | moving forward

QDA SPECIAL