

Support Clean Air!

In March 2005, the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) issued two permits to Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) allowing for the open burning of depleted uranium, high explosives, wood and diesel fuel. Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety, the Embudo Valley Environmental Monitoring Group and Tewa Women United are appealing the permits to the New Mexico Environmental Improvement Board. The hearing is scheduled for December 6 and 7, 2005.

The permits allow LANL to conduct up to 383 open burns per year at three technical areas (TAs) on the mesa tops and in canyon bottoms on the Pajarito Plateau. LANL is allowed to burn: 1,584 lbs. of depleted uranium (DU), 3,717 lbs. of high explosives (HE), 91,000 lbs. of wood and 800 gallons of diesel or jet fuel. These permits are for only three sites, of perhaps a dozen other sites that are permitted by state or federal agencies or self-regulated by the Department of Energy (DOE) at LANL under the Atomic Energy Act and the Munitions Rule.

TA-11: LANL conducts experiments simulating transportation accident scenarios at a 150-foot drop tower and a fuel fire test facility. Both experiments use DU and HE. DU is used to simulate plutonium. The drop tower experiment is then burned in a wood fire, which is fed by either diesel or jet fuel.

TA-16: LANL burns HE off of metal with propane torches at a facility called the "Flash Pad." The metal is then recycled and made available to the public.

TA-36: LANL conducts experiments in which a horizontal sled track is used to simulate transportation accident scenarios. DU, HE, wood and fuel are used.

For one of the first times since open burning operations began at LANL in 1943, the public has the opportunity to participate in the permitting process. Previously, LANL was permitted to conduct these activities under the open burn barrel regulations. Those regulations were deemed illegal by the State of New Mexico in 2004. The NMED stated that "backyard trash burning is far more harmful to our health than previously thought. The pollutants produced by backyard trash burning can increase the risk of heart disease, aggravate respiratory ailments such as asthma and emphysema, and cause rashes, nausea, or headaches."¹

Evidence indicates that exposure to DU, HE and its by-products can cause seizures, nausea and vomiting. DU is a byproduct of the enrichment process of naturally occurring uranium for nuclear reactors and nuclear weapons. Natural uranium is processed and concentrated through enrichment.² DU emits 60% as much alpha radiation, 85% as much gamma radiation and about the same beta radiation as naturally occurring uranium.³ One form of HE, called RDX, has been classified by the Environmental Protection Agency as a possible human carcinogen.⁴

¹ NMED Air Quality Bureau. http://www.nmenv.state.nm.us/aqb/projects/openburn/openburning_index.html. Retrieved September 9, 2005.

² World Health Organization fact sheet No. 257. Depleted Uranium. Revised January 2003. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs257/en/> Retrieved on September 8, 2005.

International Atomic Energy Agency. Depleted Uranium. http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/Features/DU/du_qaa.shtml Retrieved on September 8, 2005.

³ Military Toxics Project. June 2003. "Depleted Uranium Munitions: Nuclear Waste as a Weapon." <http://www.miltoxproj.org/DU%20Fact%20Sheet.htm> Retrieved September 8, 2005.

⁴ <http://www.GlobalSecurity.org>. Retrieved October 5, 2005.

What You Can Do

Our postcard campaign is directed to four decision makers: Governor Bill Richardson, Senator Jeff Bingaman, Representative Tom Udall and NMED Secretary Ron Curry. We are asking them to rescind the permits because they are not protective of our health and environment. We are asking that any new permits must require:

Real-time monitoring of radioactive and hazardous air pollutants resulting from the open burning activities. The monitoring results must be available to the public in a timely manner through the Internet.

Monthly soil and water sampling and analyses in neighboring communities. Under the Munitions Rule, sites conducting such activities may take pre- and post-burning soil samples.

Investigation of alternatives to the open burning and timely implementation. LANL must present to NMED viable alternatives to these activities. Alternatives do exist. Over the years, LANL has stated that open burning is the only alternative because the cost of building an enclosed facility with air filtration would be too expensive.

Health assessments or studies in communities within a 60-mile radius of LANL. The burning activities produce toxic air pollutants. Under New Mexico's Ambient Air Quality regulations, if the levels of the toxic air pollutants exceed one-one hundredth (1/100th) of the Occupational Exposure Limit, then a health assessment is required to be submitted by LANL. However, we don't know if LANL is exceeding the pollutant levels because they are not required to monitor the burns. LANL has provided NMED with estimates of the emissions, which are then used in the computer models to estimate the exposure dose to the public. Independent and community based health studies may indicate past and present exposures to these emissions.

Please support clean air! Sign the postcards today!

A collaborative effort of:

Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety, ccns@nuclearactive.org
Embudo Valley Environmental Monitoring Group, serit@cybermesa.com
Tewa Women United, tewawomen@cybermesa.com

For more information, please visit: www.nuclearactive.org

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