



Nuclear Reactor

Santa Fe, NM
Fall/Winter 2000

Fire, Water and The Aftermath: Conference on the Cerro Grande Fire

In response to citizen concerns about possible after-effects stemming from the May 2000 Cerro Grande Fire, which burned one-third of Los Alamos National Laboratory's (LANL) property, CCNS hosted the first of two conferences on July 8 at the Eldorado Hotel in Santa Fe.

The aim of the conference, *Fire, Water, and the Aftermath: The Cerro Grande Fire & Its Effect on the Rio Grande/Bravo Watershed*, was to initiate an integrated Citizens' Oversight strategy designed to protect the Rio Grande from nuclear and hazardous materials contamination related to LANL activities. More than 400 participants listened to both local and national experts express the need for broadened public awareness on the

health and environmental risks that area residents may face in the fire's aftermath. Participants were also encouraged to engage in independent oversight of LANL's measures toward protecting New Mexico's largest watershed.

After almost six decades of radioactive and hazardous wastes generated by nuclear weapons work at LANL, it was widely accepted that there is reason to be concerned about possible contaminant run-off during New Mexico's annual monsoon season

(June through August). While this season's monsoons never became a reality, concerns will rise again next spring when the snowmelt begins to run into the arroyos and canyons, and ultimately to the Rio Grande. continued on page 2



L to R: Jose Lucero, Robert Alvarez, Keith Easthouse, Leon Roybal, Owen Hoffman, Jim Rutenber, Chellis Glendinning, and Deb Hibbard, speakers at the morning session

Suzanne Westery

DOE Raises Estimate of Buried Plutonium

Recently, in response to 1997 allegations by the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research (IEER) that governmental data on the amount and toxicity of buried plutonium and other radioactive waste was inconsistent and contradictory, the Department of Energy (DOE) upped its estimates of previously disposed nuclear waste ten-fold—from 3% to 30% of retrievable waste.

Until the early 1970s, much of the plutonium generated from nuclear weapons production was not separated from transuranic waste (elements heavier than uranium, including plutonium) prior to disposal. Since 1987, DOE has maintained that only about 3% of such waste was casually, in terms of radioactivity, dumped

into soil or buried in shallow dumps, that more than 97% of plutonium and related wastes were locked up in retrievable storage, awaiting deep burial in an underground repository. Currently, the only permanent DOE repository for retrievable waste is the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP), near Carlsbad, which opened in March 1999.

According to Arjun Makhijani, IEER's president, new evidence indicates that "radioactive material spreads throughout soil far more readily than [previously] believed, and since the material remains radioactive for thousands of years, even slow movement through soil can ultimately threaten underground water supplies.... Protecting the purity of [our] water is essential."



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FIRE WATER CONFERENCE

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A LANL spokesman attending the conference said, "There definitely will be movement of contaminated sediments off lab property. It's a question of when, not if floodwaters come through." Because of the 626 known "potential release" sites, emergency teams of hydrologists, soil scientists and other experts conferred to discuss what the next steps should be.

The majority of audience members cited their biggest concern as a lack of confidence in information released by LANL or Department of Energy (DOE) officials. Bob Alvarez, one of the panel experts and former environmental policy advisor for DOE, urged, "It is time for the [LANL] site to be put on the Superfund National Priority List because it has definitely become a major environmen-

tal problem." The possibility that LANL will become a Superfund site is currently being considered.

The White Paper, authored by Bob Alvarez, summarizes the issues discussed at the conference, as well as highlights public and panelist expectations. It will be available on our website soon.

The second watershed conference is planned for March 2001, and will feature presentations and discussion on the findings of LANL, the New Mexico Environment Department, and other groups that are involved; the cleanup that has been done; and how the concerns for protecting the Watershed are being met.

CCNS LOOKS FORWARD TO SEEING

YOU AT OUR NEXT CONFERENCE. ☸

WIPP Update

In late July, the Department of Energy (DOE) proposed modifications to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) operating permit that would allow shipments of transuranic waste received there to be characterized upon arrival instead of at the shipment's point of origin. Characterization refers to the process of determining what is contained in the waste.

CCNS, in coalition with other New Mexico environmental groups, distributed preprinted neon green postcards addressed to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED), the state agency that issued the permit, stating opposition to DOE's proposed modifications. Nearly 700 concerned citizens responded. According to NMED, public interest was one of the key reasons why the agency found DOE's proposal inadequate. As a result, DOE withdrew their application. CCNS would like to thank all those who returned the postcards to NMED.

The DOE will be resubmitting a revised modification request, as well as a permit modification proposal that would allow them to bring remote-handled (RH) waste to WIPP by 2002. RH waste, which can have a dose rate on the container surface of up to 1,000 rem, will cause irreversible harm after only eight seconds of exposure. The DOE knows very little about this waste.

These proposed changes represent what activists have always thought — that once WIPP opened, political forces would create a climate that portrayed WIPP as the answer to all of the nation's nuclear waste problems. Already high-level discussions are taking place to change WIPP's mission by allowing disposal of spent fuel rods from nuclear power plants.

Now is the time to get involved. NMED has responded to our voice. Let's keep the pressure on them. CCNS, in coalition with the other groups, will prepare educational materials and hold information meetings on the proposed modifications. We will keep you posted. ☸

CCNS Endowment Fund

The CCNS Board of Directors announces the establishment of the CCNS Endowment Fund. An endowment fund is a savings account in which an organization sets aside money in a reserve fund. Your donation to the CCNS Endowment Fund goes directly into this savings account. The interest is used to augment the annual budget. The principle is left in place to keep working for the organization. A gift to the Endowment Fund reflects your belief that CCNS will continue to do important work well into the future. For more information on contributing to the of CCNS, please call the office. Thanks.



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←-----What's New at CCNS-----→

CCNS Health Program

Our staff and board is very pleased to announce the implementation of the CCNS Health Program (CHP). Dr. Jennifer Ziska-Davies, a family physician with a Masters in Public Health, has joined the CCNS staff as the CHP Director. Additionally, Dr. Ziska-Davies will be working closely with the CCNS Community Radiation Education Project (CREP), and with Marian Naranjo, CCNS' Native Communities Outreach Program Director.

The CHP is a public health effort aimed at identifying the health effects of low-level radiation exposure and determining the applicability of such effects to communities exposed to radiation sources from Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) nuclear weapons production. However, the CHP is not a medical program—it does not aim to either diagnosis or treat individual health problems that may or may not stem from radiation exposure. (The diagnosis and treatment of radiation exposure and its effects are better left to one's own healthcare provider). The CHP, rather, will focus on the examination of epidemiological data and basic science research related to radiation health effects. For example, the CHP will be examining the New Mexico

Tumor Registry for incidences of radiation-sensitive cancers in Los Alamos and downwind counties.

Adjunct researchers on the CHP will include Dr. Steven Wing, a noted epidemiologist in the radiation health effects field from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (who for years has examined LANL employee health records as part of his research), and professionals from the Childhood Cancer Research Institute (CCRI) in Worcester, Massachusetts. Dr. Ziska-Davies and CCRI researchers will be conducting basic radiation education training throughout Northern New Mexico for interested medical and allied healthcare professionals.

In keeping with CCNS' aim of stopping further degradation of the environment by LANL activities, the results generated by CHPs research will be used to create new educational materials and programs for both the public and policy makers. Through the use of educational materials and trainings, CCNS works to educate the citizens of Northern New Mexico, so that together we can pressure LANL to be accountable to its surrounding communities. ☸

←-----CREP Nearing Phase I Completion-----→

For the past three years, CCNS has been working in collaboration with the University of New Mexico Masters in Public Health Program (UNM MPHP) on Phase I of the Community Radiation Education Project (CREP). Phase I included presentations to Elders and community members from five Northern New Mexico pueblos in which basic environmental and radiation awareness information was shared. Phase I projects, which are nearly complete, include the creation of a video, *Shadow on the Hill* (see side-bar for premiere location and date), and the Radiation Study Guide. Feedback and comments from the participating pue-

los have been instrumental in fine-tuning the study guide before its final publication in early December.

The study guide is designed for presentation to community members of all ages and will help educate the citizenry of Northern New Mexico about the basics of radiation and its effects on human health and the environment. Related subjects presented in the study guide include the history of the nuclear industry; uranium mining; laws and policies; and citizen involvement. CCNS plans to distribute and present the study guide and video to interested schools and communities in January 2001.

YOU'RE INVITED! ☸

CCNS/UNM MPHP Proudly Presents the Video Premier

Shadow on the Hill

A Thought Provoking Look at Los Alamos National Laboratory

Tuesday, December 12 at 7:00pm

Kiva Lecture Hall University of New Mexico

Donations Gladly Accepted

Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety (505)986-1973

←-----ANA—Alliance for Nuclear Accountability-----→

Joni Arends, CCNS Waste Programs Director, was elected to a two-year term on the Board of the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability (ANA) at its September meeting in Amarillo, Texas. Founded in 1987 under the name Military Production network, ANA has evolved into a network of more than 30 local, regional and national peace and environmental groups working together to address the concerns of communities in the shadows of U.S. nuclear weapons sites

and radioactive waste dumps. ANA has worked effectively to help shut down polluting, obsolete, and unsafe facilities at the Department of Energy (DOE); to help stop nuclear weapons testing at the Nevada Test Site; and to block the construction of many new bomb production plants.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CHECK OUT THE ANA WEBSITE AT WWW.ANANUCLEAR.ORG. ☸



concerned citizens
for nuclear safety

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visit our web site at:
nuclearactive.org

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Upcoming Events

- DECEMBER 12, 2000** 7 PM World Premier of CCNS/
UNM Video, *Shadow on the Hill*
- DECEMBER 15, 2000** Clean Air Act 2nd LANL Audit
Final Report
- MARCH, 2001** *FIRE, WATER AND THE AFTER-
MATH: The Cerro Grande Fire & Its
Effect on the Rio Grande/Bravo Watershed*
CONFERENCE — PART 2

Call CCNS at 505-986-1973 for more information.

CCNS Search: Executive Director

CCNS, an established environmental/anti-nuclear non-profit organization, is seeking an Executive Director with a degree in the sciences, economics, law, business, or an environmentally-related field to begin in January, 2001. An understanding of the nuclear weapons production complex and history of the Department of Energy's nuclear programs is a plus. For further information please call 505-986-1973.

CCNS Mission Statement

Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety (CCNS), based in Santa Fe, New Mexico, is a non-profit organization that has earned a national reputation for community organizing, research, litigation, public education, and outreach on a wide range of nuclear safety and environmental issues. CCNS disseminates information about the consequences of the production, transportation, storage, and disposal of radioactive and hazardous materials, and pursues enforcement of environmental laws.

A primary goal of CCNS is to stop the further degradation of the environment by supporting the cleanup and environmental restoration of contaminated areas created by the Department of Energy in New Mexico. CCNS supports the eventual abolition of all nuclear weapons pursuant to Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. CCNS also supports the transformation of Los Alamos National Laboratory's mission of research, development, and testing of nuclear weapons to a premier research center for cleanup of radioactive and hazardous materials from nuclear weapons.

