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July 7, 2006
Immediate Release

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Secretary Curry Statement on Discovery of 1,4-Dioxane at Los Alamos National Laboratory

(Santa Fe, NM) — New Mexico Environment Department Secretary Ron Curry today issued the following statement on the recent discovery of 1,4-dioxane in intermediate groundwater zones beneath Mortandad Canyon in Los Alamos National Laboratory. LANL has reported that the contamination was detected in two wells at depths of 450 feet and 250 feet above the regional aquifer.

“This discovery serves to emphasize the importance of the state’s comprehensive cleanup order with Los Alamos,” Secretary Curry said. “The Consent Order requires LANL to submit written notification of any discovery of previously unknown releases of contaminants within 15 days of the discovery. However, LANL collected these groundwater samples more than a year ago. I am dismayed and disappointed by this delay in reporting and expect that with the new laboratory managers in place we will see environmental management and cleanup take on a higher priority than it has in the past.”

NMED will be requiring a full investigation of the source and extent of the contamination, as well as any possible threats to public drinking water supplies, under the Consent Order. LANL also did not report in a timely manner its discovery in the regional aquifer of chromium-VI.

According to LANL’s reporting, the dioxane contamination level appears to be below cleanup levels established through the Consent Order that are based on U.S. Environmental Protection Agency risk calculations. According to those calculations, clean up would be required at 61 parts per billion (ppb). LANL reports concentrations ranging between 20 ppb and 56 ppb.

“New Mexicans deserve immediate notification when problems are uncovered at the lab,” Secretary Curry said. “NMED will review these findings to determine if any clean up is required under the fence-to-fence cleanup order. Any threats to groundwater or drinking water supplies must be dealt with swiftly through a thorough and aggressive cleanup. There needs to be a clear line of accountability between NNSA, DOE and LANL in regards to environmental management at the laboratory and who is ultimately responsible for clean up under the Consent Order.”

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