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Immediate Release

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Environment Department Approves LANL Work Plan to Investigate Chromium Contaminated Groundwater

(Santa Fe, NM) — The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) has approved with modifications Los Alamos National Laboratory's (LANL) initial work plan for investigating the extent and nature of chromium contamination discovered in the Los Alamos regional aquifer. LANL must initiate fieldwork immediately. A revised work plan incorporating the modifications must be submitted within 90 days.

"This aggressive investigation will help us understand the size and scope of the contamination plume," NMED Secretary Ron Curry said. "Once that information is gathered, any remediation required can be undertaken quickly and effectively. Water is our most important resource and we will continue to insist that LANL protect the area's water for future generations."

Among the requirements included in the modifications, LANL must prepare within 30 days a separate investigation plan to drill a new deep well to determine the vertical extent of chromium contamination in the regional aquifer near well R-28 that registered the high chromium levels. Drilling such a well is expected to provide valuable information concerning the protection of the nearest municipal drinking water supply well, PM-3, which is less than 1 mile from R-28.

LANL must also: 1) prepare a schedule for the proposed characterization and reporting activities detailed in the work plan; 2) prepare a Historical Investigation Report that includes a review of the potential influences of drinking water production wells on the migration of the chromium plume, provides dates and volumes of discharges into the upper Sandia Canyon from the Sanitary Wastewater Consolidation project, and notes timeframes and changes in operations that may have altered the area's hydrologic system; 3) provide a well construction diagram for proposed shallow groundwater wells in lower Sandia Canyon; and 4) explain how the work plan will refine understanding of the conceptual and mathematical models of the regional aquifer, among other required modifications.

The Historical Investigation Report and an Interim Measures Report that will include the results of the Interim Measures investigations are due no later than November 30. A Phase II Investigation Work Plan for a subsequent phase of work to further delineate potential chromium sources and groundwater contamination is due by December 30.

The entire approval letter with modifications, as well as LANL's proposed work plan is available on NMED's Web site at www.nmenv.state.nm.us/hwb/lanlperm.html.

May 10, 2006

NMED Approves with Modifications LANL's Chromium Contamination Work Plan

LANL notified NMED in December 2005 of groundwater detections of chromium at concentrations four times above the Safe Drinking Water Act (100 micrograms per liter) and eight times above the New Mexico Water Quality Control Commission groundwater standards (50 micrograms per liter). Under the historic 2005 Order on Consent, NMED required LANL to develop an aggressive investigation and cleanup program to determine the source and magnitude of chromium contamination found in the aquifer, used as the sole drinking water supply for the laboratory, the town of Los Alamos, and White Rock. An aggressive testing regimen for all the water supply wells that serve the lab and these communities has shown that chromium contamination is not affecting local water supplies.

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