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For Immediate Release

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## **Environment Department Proposes \$795,000 Penalty for Chromium Contamination at Los Alamos National Laboratory**

(Santa Fe, NM) — The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) issued a Notice of Violation and a proposed penalty of \$795,620 on Thursday to operators of Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) for violating the Order on Consent by failing to report chromium contamination in a groundwater monitoring well at the lab last year.

This action marks the second violation by operators of the lab, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and Los Alamos National Security, LLC (LANS), of the recently signed fence-to-fence clean up order.

“New Mexico’s groundwater is the source of drinking water for the vast majority of our citizens and the amount of this penalty reflects this importance,” said New Mexico Environment Department Secretary Ron Curry. “Reporting requirements were included in the historic clean up order so citizens would be aware of pollution and we could get a head start on cleaning it up. NMED has had a good experience so far with the lab’s new manager. I hope they use this enforcement action as an opportunity to show how they will interact with the state on similar issues in the future.”

Four groundwater samples taken from the monitoring well in Mortandad Canyon between 2004 and 2005 detected toxic hexavalent chromium at four times the drinking water standard and eight times the state groundwater quality standard. However, LANL did not report the finding to NMED until late 2005.

Hexavalent chromium is not naturally occurring and is used in lab operations. Hexavalent chromium is known to cause cancer and kidney and liver damage in humans.

The Mortandad Canyon well monitors the aquifer that the people of Los Alamos and White Rock rely on for drinking water. Despite this pollution, drinking water supplies for the citizens of Los Alamos and White Rock are regularly monitored and did not show levels of chromium above drinking water or state standards.

After the lab notified NMED of the chromium contamination, NMED required the lab to develop an aggressive cleanup program to determine the source and level of chromium contamination. The fence-to-fence cleanup order requires the lab to report in writing new releases of contaminants and groundwater contamination significantly above natural conditions. The order became effective in March 2005. The lab’s hazardous waste permit from NMED also requires the lab to verbally report new releases of contaminants and groundwater contamination significantly above natural conditions within a day of the finding. The violation contains the proposed penalty of \$795,620 and an offer to the lab of entering into settlement discussions with NMED.

NMED also issued a Notice of Violation to DOE and LANS on July 12 after NMED alleged the lab and DOE disposed of potentially hazardous waste at the Los Alamos County municipal landfill. DOE disposed of more than 20 tons of waste from the cleanup of the Ash Pile site near Los Alamos County Airport at the landfill in November 2005.

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