



Bill Richardson
Governor

**NEW MEXICO
ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT**

Office of the Secretary

Harold Runnels Building
1190 Saint Francis Drive (87505)
PO Box 26110, Santa Fe, NM 87502
Phone (505) 827-2855 Fax (505) 827-2836
www.nmenv.state.nm.us



Ron Curry
Secretary
Jon Goldstein
Deputy Secretary

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Contact: Marissa Stone Bardino, NMED Communications Director
(505) 827-0314 or (505) 231-0475

Environment Department Succeeds in Effort that Will Inform Residents about Possible Radiological Contaminants in Rio Grande

LANL Withdraws Opposition to Environment Department's Proposal to Establish Monitoring and Reporting Standards for Rio Grande

(Santa Fe, NM) –Los Alamos National Laboratory announced today during a state surface water quality hearing in Santa Fe that it will withdraw its opposition to a proposal by the New Mexico Environment Department to set numeric water quality standards for monitoring and reporting of radiological contaminants in the Rio Grande downgradient of the lab.

The department developed the proposal in response to concerns from the public about the health risks of radiological contaminants such as plutonium in water from the Rio Grande being diverted by the Buckman Diversion Project. That project will allow water from the river to be used by residents of the Santa Fe area.

“I am pleased LANL is withdrawing its opposition to our proposal that will allow us to more effectively inform the public about potential risks from lab discharges of contaminants into the Rio Grande,” said New Mexico Environment Department Secretary Ron Curry. “Our proposal was designed to generate credible scientific data and to help the public understand the risks posed by those contaminants. Residents should have access to that information.”

Reliable groundwater and surface water monitoring networks that detect radiological contaminants are critical in determining whether hazardous pollution from waste and other sites at LANL are reaching groundwater and the Rio Grande. The department has consistently stated that this data should be available to the public.

The department proposed at a hearing of the state Water Quality Control Commission its monitoring and reporting criteria for radiological contaminants. Areas that would fall under the proposal include the stretch of the Rio Grande that includes discharges from canyons at LANL and the Buckman Diversion.

The department presented its proposal at the Triennial Review of the State's surface water quality standards in response to public concerns that contaminants from LANL could move into the Rio Grande above the Buckman Diversion. More than 100 members of the public provided written comments to the department

expressing concern about the lack of numeric criteria for radiological contaminants in the Rio Grande upgradient of the Buckman diversion and that such data should be available to the public.

The hearing is being held to revise and update the states surface water quality standards to ensure they reflect current science and current policy. A review of the standards is required every three years by the federal Clean Water Act. The hearing, which began Tuesday, is scheduled to last until at least Thursday, and may extend into Friday. Public comments are welcome each day of the hearing after the commission's lunch break.

For more information, call Marissa Stone Bardino at (505) 827-0314.

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