



Kieling, John, NMENV

From: GARY MCMATH [gmmcmath@msn.com]
Sent: Friday, April 02, 2010 2:02 PM
To: Kieling, John, NMENV; gmmcmath
Subject: Comments on NMED Intent to Deny Open Burning at LANL TA-16



Dear John,

The following are my personal comments on the issues currently under public comment/review regarding LANLs application for renewal of its hazardous waste operating permit. I am an employee of LANL but *my comments are my own and represent my personal opinions of the issues* listed on NMEDs website at the following address:
(<http://www.nmenv.state.nm.us/hwb/lanlperm.html>).

Ive read the NMED fact sheets and some of the comments associated with open burning at TA-16 and I believe I understand both the political and technical nature of your role in regulating this and other operations at LANL. Regarding the political nature of NMEDs position, LANL is a resource for our nation for a variety of defense related subjects which results in a high degree of interest from parties that do not support the nations defense posture. The disagreements range from US involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan to nuclear weapons research. The use of NMEDs permitting authority as means to a political end is inappropriate and an abuse of you and your staffs technical expertise. Political discussions belong in a political arena and should be directed to elected officials. I encourage you and the NMED to focus only on the technical aspects of the benefits and risks posed by LANL operations. However, if political concerns are to be included in the decision making process then I believe the benefits and risks discussion must also be expanded to include a larger set of issues. The impacts associated with the loss of work at LANL as funding moves to other facilities to perform these operations must be considered as it relates to personnel who have invested their careers here in Northern New Mexico. Additionally, the ripple effects of funding losses across the myriad of businesses that work for LANL must be included. I encourage you and the NMED to remain outside the political fray and focus on information that relates solely to the environmental and legal impacts of LANLs operations the Pajarito Plateau.

The ecological risk assessment and NMEDs position regarding open burning of HE wastes and equipment contained in the fact sheets indicates there is little to no risk to any organisms other than earthworms and deer mice. I did not see any mention of the areal extent expected as a result of these impacts. Because I work at LANL I know the area associated with open burning is relatively small. LANL covers approximately 43 square miles of area and the buffer zones created to protect both the public from our operations and our security needs provide local wildlife large areas of undisturbed habitat with little to no interference. As a resident of an area adjacent to TA-16, I can assure you the bear, elk, deer, bobcat, mountain lion, coyote, bird and other wildlife populations enjoy an environment free from molestation. Additionally, there are certain times of the year that specific types of operations are not allowed because the spotted owl (a T&E species) are breeding. Please consider the larger benefit afforded the environment and wildlife that comes with LANLs need to maintain large buffer areas for our operations. A small area of low potential impact to non-threatened species such as the open burning area at TA-16 should be compared with the large areas of habitat protected from poaching, illegal wood cutting, unauthorized off-road vehicle access, etc. Essentially, LANL provides security to 43 square miles of premium habitat. While these considerations do not relate to contaminant levels or other

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numeric standards, they should be considered as part of the risk assessments that ultimately determine whether an operation or activity poses an acceptable risk.

Risk assessments for humans discussed in the fact sheets indicate there are acceptable levels of risk posed by the chemicals that may result from open air burning. Alternative options such as offsite shipment and treatment are discussed to address the low levels of risk to wildlife. As a worker familiar with explosives, their use, and hazards I encourage consideration of the added hazards that will be experienced with the options discussed. High explosives are a necessary component of many research activities at LANL. A great deal of time and effort is expended to insure their use here is safe for the public and the work force. The current practice of eliminating residual explosive hazards by burning is by the far the safest method of treatment available to LANL. To state that additional handling, packaging, and shipping may be viable options to the open burning completely ignores the added hazards that workers will face if open burning operations are replaced by these alternatives. I believe a comparison of options that result in a reduction of risk from low to no risk for a relatively small group of organisms when compared to options that increase risk to workers is not a reasonable course of action.

It is easy to lose focus on the larger environmental risks and benefits when focusing either on small scale comparisons or when political considerations fog the decision making process. I encourage you and your organization to look at the big picture and help LANL continue to provide safe and compliant operations to New Mexico and the nation.

Thank you for accepting my comments.

Gary McMath
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