

**Comments Prepared by Kenneth E. Mayers, Major USMCR (Ret'd)
For the
New Mexico Environment Department (NMED)
Hearings on LANL draft Hazardous Waste Permit**

My name is Ken Mayers. I am a one-time career Marine Corps officer and a member of the Joan Duffy Chapter of Veterans for Peace in Santa Fe. I am here today to address specifically one of the rationales that Los Alamos National Laboratories offers in support of their application for the 10 year open burn permit, to wit:

“Without open burning, the Lab’s research on detecting explosives, defeating improvised bombs, and creating stronger armor would be jeopardized.”¹

Or, as expressed more emotionally by LANL employee John Gustafson,

“The New Mexico Environment Department is considering an action that will put at greater risk the lives of our military personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan.”²

As a former active duty Marine, I naturally resonate with proclaimed efforts to “protect our troops.” However this resonance is greatly attenuated when I reflect on the fact that “protection of the troops” as a screen for less admirable motives has been associated with the work and products of our Defense Department in General and LANL in particular from 1945 onward.

In the first instance, that claim was offered as the reason for the atomic bombing of Japan, even though there is ample evidence that the Japanese were earnestly seeking to surrender under terms essentially identical to those ultimately accepted weeks before the bombing.

More recently, between 1961 and 1971, American forces sprayed nearly 20 million gallons of Agent Orange and other herbicides on Vietnam “to protect the troops” who were assured by the government that the

¹ www.lanl.gov/environment/waste/docs/progs/LA-UR-10-01636.pdf - 2010-03-23

² “Burn Permit Helps with Technology” letter to Journal North



reason for supporting the open burn. I would suggest that the real reason is to avoid the tough political work that would be necessary to obtain the funding necessary to provide a safe means for disposing of this legacy waste. Safe proven means of waste disposal, notably confined burning, have been available for years and must be required of the Labs.

The disposing of waste is a largely unrecognized cost of the Lab's programs. As long as we allow the Labs to externalize these costs, they will continue to be paid in a variety of painful ways by New Mexicans for generations to come. I urge the New Mexico Environment Department to live up to its responsibilities by denying the open burn permit.

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