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New Mexico Conference of Churches

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April 26, 2010

New Mexico Environment Department Hazardous Waste Bureau
2905 Rodeo Park Drive East, Building 1
Santa Fe, NM 87505-6303

To Whom it May Concern:

I wish to speak out in opposition to awarding Los Alamos National Labs a waste permit for the open air burning of dangerous wastes and the continued systematic spoilage of our land, water, and air in this ancient and beautiful land.

For 17 years I worked with the Ghost Ranch National Conference Center. From 2000 through 2009 I served as the Director of Program and was charged with planning and staffing more than 300 educational programs each year. Before Ghost Ranch was given to the church it was owned by Arthur and Phoebe Pack. Arthur was an environmentalist who helped repopulate the high desert with several species of animals and who worked tirelessly for clean air and water. During the early 1940's, families would arrive from the "mountain" (Los Alamos) to stay at the dude ranch, and it was only after the war that Arthur discovered that during that time the Lab was conducting dangerous tests on what would later be called the atom bomb. Therefore, when Arthur Pack made a gift of his beloved Ranch, he also gave a mission: this land must be a land of peace and justice, not war and destruction. This land is God's creation and we must be its stewards not its destroyers.

That was the mission under which I worked made programming decisions. It was my privilege to work with our neighbors including TEWA Women United. Through this dedicated group of native women, I discovered the extent of the tragic history of waste from the "mountain"; the contamination of the waters that has killed the fish, created unsafe drinking water; spoiled the canyons, and made inaccessible the ancient, sacred places.

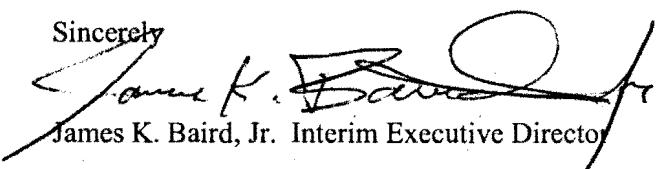
As I learned more about the Los Alamos legacy, I discovered that Arthur Pack was only beginning to see that legacy. He witnessed the immediate destruction caused by the powerful bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He did not live long enough to see the long term destruction, every bit as powerful and destructive as the ball of fire over a city – the slow and insidious destruction by contamination of our land, water, and air.

Approximately 21,000,000 cubic feet of hazardous/mixed hazardous, and radioactive waste generated from nuclear weapons production has been buried at LANL legacy waste dumps all across the Los Alamos mesas. Now a permit is being sought to continue open burning that has been proven to release dioxins into the air.

Although New Mexico citizens continued to call for LANL to cease using our air and our water to dispose of these dangerous chemicals, their voices have gone unheeded by an agency that continues to act with impunity and privilege. The time to stop this process is now.

As an organization representing more than 600,000 Citizen Christians in this State, it is often called upon to voice the concerns and the needs of the voiceless. In this case many voices (beginning with those of our Native American sisters and brothers) have been raised eloquently through the years. What is missing is the will to act -- to step forward as a State and not permit these activities to continue. I urge you to deny LANL's permit applications, and to strongly monitor their future activities.

Sincerely



James K. Baird, Jr. Interim Executive Director

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membership

