

Press Release, August 7, 2003

48 Businesses and Organizations Request Closure of Los Alamos Nuke Dump Site

Contact: Greg Mello, 505-265-1200

ALBUQUERQUE – Twenty-five non-profit environmental and other organizations, along with 23 northern New Mexico businesses, joined their voices yesterday in calling for closure of the “Area G” nuclear waste disposal site in Los Alamos.

Their joint letter follows a similar, more detailed letter which was signed in January of last year by 27 environmental organizations (some of whom also signed yesterday’s letter) and follows closely on the heels of a petition by at least 3,350 individuals to close the dump, delivered to the Governor in a Rotunda press conference on June 26.

The text of both letters, together with the signatories to each, can be found at <http://www.lasg.org>. Background information on the site, at which millions of drums of nuclear waste are to be disposed in the coming decades, and on some of the issues surrounding that disposal, is also available there.

Additional letters with additional signatories will follow these, as efforts to recruit businesses and nonprofits intensify in the coming months. Study Group Director Mello: “We hope that other nonprofits and businesses in New Mexico will join those who have stepped forward this week. This is an age of political cynicism, but these organizations and businesses understand that only by our participation can we save our democracy.

“A great deal of credit is due to a few volunteers, especially Annie O’Halloran, who has led the effort to recruit supporters.”

Governor Richardson, Environment Department Secretary Ron Curry, and Attorney General Patricia Madrid, whose office has declared disposal at Area G illegal under the state’s Hazardous Waste Act as well as federal law, all declined to appear at, or send representatives to, the press conference in June.

One reason for the lack of enforcement at Area G and at Los Alamos in general may be the conflict of interest in the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED), which receives significant operating funds for oversight of Department of Energy (DOE) facilities from the DOE itself. In other words, many NMED employees serve at the pleasure of DOE.

In addition, NMED has been tied up in litigation filed by the University of California (UC), and joined by DOE, against New Mexico, which aims to strip all regulatory authority from the state and from federal environmental law for *all* nuclear waste resulting from the nation’s nuclear weapons program – even if that waste is commingled with chemical waste which the state has, up to now, been able to regulate.

The Governor, who may have political ambitions beyond New Mexico, has not made any public statements about these extremely significant lawsuits – and neither has the Attorney General – leaving their respective legal and technical staffs to battle law firms in New Mexico, California, and in the Justice Department in Albuquerque and Washington, DC, all funded by the deep pockets of the U.S. government.

ENDS