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Inside Briefing Summary Indicates LANL Security Breach Very Serious

Santa Fe, NM - Nuclear Watch New Mexico has received a summary of an inside briefing at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) on the status of the Lab's latest security infraction. If true, this summary indicates that a very serious and compromising breach has occurred; perhaps the most serious in LANL's long line of security breaches. While its author is unknown, the precision of detail and obvious inside knowledge shown in the summary is striking.

On October 17 Los Alamos County police responded to a domestic violence call. After entering a mobile home they found drug paraphernalia, which led to a further search that discovered classified Laboratory documents. Initial reports stated that three "thumb drives" (portable computer memory sticks) containing classified information were found.

The summary declares that far more was found. First, it states that the thumb drives themselves contained a total of 408 separate classified documents that ranged from national security intelligence information to secret data pertaining to nuclear weapons. All of that information is stated to have originated from the highly secure classified documents/media vault of the Lab's HX [Hydrodynamic Experiments] Division. Further, the summary states that hard copies of other classified documents were found, in total 228 separate pages printed front and back. The summary indicates that the reported owner of the trailer where the classified information was found had a Sigma 15 Q clearance. That clearance level would have allowed her to read classified documents that could have information on how to bypass strict "permissive action links" that allow only for authorized use of nuclear weapons.

Jay Coghlan, Executive Director of Nuclear Watch New Mexico, noted, "While we cannot guarantee the authenticity of the summary, we are hoping that its release will lead the public and Congress to ask the right questions. The contents of the misappropriated classified documents should not be revealed, but on the other hand the extent of the seriousness of this security breach should not be covered up. Further, in light of these events, the declared policy of the National Nuclear Security Administration to grant the new contractor greater self-oversight in Lab management needs to be critically examined. Congress should and must conduct investigative hearings into all of the above."

As a grand irony, the NNSA was created in October 1999, with Senator Domenici as its principal legislative architect, primarily to address security concerns after the Wen Ho Lee case. In June 2000, computer hard drives with classified information were missing for eleven days, only to mysteriously reappear in a room that had already been repeatedly searched. In 2004, classified removable electronic media was reported missing, only later to be declared non-existent because of an inventory mistake. Nevertheless, that security scare was a contributing factor to a six-month standdown to LANL operations that cost American taxpayers at least \$365 million.

This latest security breach could be the most serious yet, but Linton Brooks, head of the NNSA, declared in a May 2006 memo that greater contractor self-oversight at LANL was to be “a two-year pilot of our oversight model” for the nuclear weapons complex, beginning October 1, 2006. His memo specifically excluded security for the time being from greater contractor self-oversight. However, Coghlan added, “We received an indication that the exemption may pertain only to physical security and not to cybersecurity. If true, that is exactly backwards as current events show. Hard questions need to be asked. Congress should forcibly block any movement toward contractor self-oversight in cybersecurity at LANL and throughout all of the nuclear weapons complex.”

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The inside briefing summary is available at www.nukewatch.org. The May 2006 NNSA memo ordering greater contractor self-oversight at LANL is available at www.nukewatch.org/facts/nwd/LASO-Brooks_B_Oversight.pdf. The memo itself is undated.