



For immediate release September 21, 2016

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New Mexican Politicians Should Not Be Misled Energy Dept Misrepresents Cost and Scope of Los Alamos Cleanup

Santa Fe, NM – The Department of Energy (DOE) has released a *2016 Lifecycle Cost Estimate Summary* of proposed future cleanup at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). At the beginning of that document DOE declares that “An estimated 5,000 cubic meters of legacy waste remains, of which approximately 2,400 cm [cubic meters] is retrievably stored below ground”, a claim which was widely reported in New Mexican media. From there DOE estimates that it will cost \$2.9 to \$3.8 billion to complete so-called cleanup around 2040.

The public was notified of the *2016 Lifecycle Cost Estimate* in a September 15 Santa Fe City press release, with the subtitle “*Study Lays Out Timeline, Costs, and More, Answers Critical Questions with Honest Assessment.*” Santa Fe Mayor Javier Gonzales is quoted, “This report represents the first and most comprehensive release of specific plans to complete the cleanup of legacy waste at LANL, and is a big step forward for the people in these communities who want to see a concrete commitment to making progress.” Mayor Gonzales went on to thank Senators Udall and Heinrich and Rep. Ben Ray Lujan for their help in obtaining the report.

However, the DOE report is far from honest. It intentionally omits any mention of approximately 150,000 cubic meters of poorly characterized radioactive and toxic wastes just at Area G (LANL’s largest waste dump) alone, an amount of wastes 30 times larger than DOE acknowledges in the *2016 Lifecycle Cost Estimate*. In reality, DOE and LANL plan to not clean up Area G, instead installing an “engineered cover” and leaving the wastes permanently buried. This will create a permanent nuclear waste dump above the regional groundwater aquifer, three miles uphill from the Rio Grande. Radioactive and toxic wastes are buried directly in the ground without liners, and migration of plutonium has been detected 200 feet below Area G’s surface.

Santa Fe Mayor Gonzales is the Vice-Chair of the Regional Coalition of LANL Communities. The Coalition is comprised of elected officials from eight cities, counties and pueblos surrounding LANL, and is overwhelmingly funded by DOE and Los Alamos County. The same Santa Fe City press release quotes the RCLC Executive Director, “The Lifecycle Baseline documentation provides our communities the necessary foundation to properly advocate on behalf of the best possible scenarios for cleaning up legacy nuclear waste at the Laboratory in the most time and cost-efficient manner. After years of requests for this document, we now have the tool that can get us to additional cleanup dollars to get the job done.”

However, the *2016 Lifecycle Cost Estimate Summary* itself states that it is “based on realistic expectations of annual funding for the remaining work” (last page, unnumbered) and “annual

funding is expected to remain constant throughout the duration of the cleanup mission” (p. 5). While annual funding for the Lab’s nuclear weapons programs has climbed to \$1.5 billion, cleanup has fallen from a high of \$225 million in FY 2014 to \$189 million requested for FY 2017. Moreover, this trend of declining cleanup funding may be exacerbated by the planned trillion dollar “modernization” of U.S. nuclear forces, including research and production sites like LANL (which is slated to quadruple production of the plutonium pit triggers for nuclear weapons). Instead of being a tool for additional dollars for genuine, comprehensive cleanup, the *2016 Lifecycle Cost Estimate Summary* is a DOE ploy to avoid cleaning up more than 90% of all wastes at LANL.

Jay Coghlan, Nuclear Watch New Mexico Executive Director, commented, “Mayor Gonzales and the Regional Coalition are to be commended for getting any Lab cleanup plan at all out of the Department of Energy. But now they should take the next step and get the Department of Energy to quit being so chintzy with cleanup. Our elected officials should demand that DOE retract its false claim that there is only 5,000 cubic meters of waste left at LANL to clean up. Then our politicians should push hard for a genuine, comprehensive cleanup plan that permanently protects the environment and our precious water resources while creating hundreds of high paying jobs.”

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The Department of Energy’s *2016 Lifecycle Cost Estimate Summary* is available at <http://nukewatch.org/importantdocs/resources/LBC-Summary-Aug-2016.pdf>

Estimated quantities of waste at Area G (in cubic yards) are from Table G3.41, MDA G Corrective Measures Evaluation, 2011, LANS, p. G-13. See excerpts at http://nukewatch.org/importantdocs/resources/Area_G_Pit_Totals_from_CME_rev3_Sept-2011.pdf

The full MDA G Corrective Measures Evaluation (159 MB) is available at <http://permalink.lanl.gov/object/tr?what=info:lanl-repo/epr/ERID-206324>

Documentation of the plutonium detection 200 feet below the surface of Area G is at http://nukewatch.org/importantdocs/resources/AGCME_Plate_B-3_radionuclides_subsurface.pdf