

KEEPING SAFE IN THE ATOMIC AGE

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Abstract (Document Summary)

In 1994, CCNS discovered the lab had been violating the federal Clean Air Act. The group then sued the lab, alleging that many lab emissions were not in compliance with the law. The court ordered the parties to settle the case. As a result, three independent audits of LANL emissions were conducted before the lawsuit ended in the fall of 2003. Air standards have improved at the Lab since these proceedings.

"Violations like this show us that the lab is definitely capable of breaking the law and damaging the law for their agenda," says Cameron. "Even more importantly, though, it shows that groups like ours can make a difference in our community. Our victory in exposing the lab and changing it showed the lab that it can't get away with everything, and it shows that we can change the practices at the lab for the better. It just validates our cause."

Because of this, CCNS has been exploring options for involving teens. With help from different teenagers within the community, CCNS has been designing a postcard campaign to give to adolescents around the city and the state. This year, CCNS has received several new student volunteers from Santa Fe High School, Desert Academy and St. John's College.

Full Text (810 words)

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Atomic: Teens join group to help their community's health

Cell mutations, cancer and damage to kidneys, bones and lungs are some of the effects of ingesting depleted uranium dust. Uranium is a radioactive material regularly used by Los Alamos National Laboratory and is one of the many materials that the lab must dispose of each year.

Dealing with dangerous materials is an everyday event at our local weapons laboratory. Because of this, worries about health consequences and environmental damage mean LANL is a sometimes- controversial part of our community.

Since the government revealed what was happening in Los Alamos in the late 1940s, the citizens of Santa Fe have had mixed feelings toward this center for science. The creation and development of nuclear weapons in general causes enough debate, but making sure the lab functions legally is the focus of one Santa Fe organization.

Concerned Citizens For Nuclear Safety is a nonprofit whose goal is to monitor lab activity and practices and to make sure LANL complies with state and federal rules and regulations. Its mission is to ensure environmental protection despite what it calls

dangerous practices at the lab, such as contaminating air and water with unsafe disposal.

"It's about time that the next generation become involved in the community. Taking care of the environment is everyone's responsibility," says Sadaf Cameron, the head of community outreach and involvement at CCNS. "Not only that, but making sure that the lab does not do anything that could harm people in this community is extremely important."

Getting teens involved means the effort will continue.

"The materials used to make nuclear weapons will be in the environment and in our bodies for a long, long time," said Joni Arends, the group's executive director. "Even if we stopped making nuclear weapons and nuclear energy today, exposures to these materials will be dangerous now and in the future."

Whether or not one believes nuclear weapons should be made or developed, keeping the lab as safe as possible is important.

In 1994, CCNS discovered the lab had been violating the federal Clean Air Act. The group then sued the lab, alleging that many lab emissions were not in compliance with the law. The court ordered the parties to settle the case. As a result, three independent audits of LANL emissions were conducted before the lawsuit ended in the fall of 2003. Air standards have improved at the Lab since these proceedings.

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In their dealings with the lab, CCNS has used a variety of techniques in mobilizing the community. One of its most effective and innovative strategies has been The Postcard Campaign. The group printed the postcards that contain the mission statement of the organization and are addressed to various political figures in our state, namely to state lawmakers and the governor.

While CCNS has targeted only the adult population of Santa Fe up to this point, now organizers want to capture the teen audience. "Teenagers are the people who will be continuing the fight in the future," said Cameron. "Our mission is to keep the environment intact for them and for generations to come, so involving them in the fight is an excellent idea."

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new student volunteers from Santa Fe High School, Desert Academy and St. John's College.

Santa Fe High sophomore Alie Ewing has been helping design the campaign. "I didn't know much about the lab or their practices, and when I found out about some of the things that they have done, I decided to help out CCNS," said Alie. "It's really important that people know about their community, especially things that could effect their health and their environment. That's why I'm trying to help spread information about the lab."

Although the staff at CCNS hopes to inspire change in the nuclear- weapons industry, it will continue to work on the local level.

"We hope that we can get a lot more community input and participation whether it be from adults or teenagers," said Cameron. "With more support, we can make more of a difference."

For more information on participation opportunities, visit www.nuclearactive.org.

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