

Planning for the Future



Holtec International and the Eddy-Lea Energy Alliance (ELEA) recently announced a partnership aiming to bring an interim storage site to Southeastern New Mexico. Attendees from left to right: Jack Volpato (former Eddy County Commissioner and Chairman of the Board of the Carlsbad Chamber of Commerce); Jason Shirley (Councilman, City of Carlsbad); Alex Flint (Senior V.P., Governmental Affairs, Nuclear Energy Institute); Carroll H. Leavell (State Senator of New Mexico); John Heaton (Chairman of Eddy Lea Energy Alliance); Gregg Fulfer (Chairman, Lea County Commission; (Vice Chairman of ELEA, and Board Member, NM Environment Improvement Board); Sam Cobb (Mayor, City of Hobbs); Kris Singh (President and CEO of Holtec); Pierre Oneid (Senior V.P., and Chief Nuclear Officer of Holtec). *(Photo and Caption Courtesy of Holtec International)*

WIPP's Twofold Employment Concerns

Recently, two issues concerning employment at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant have arisen that need to be addressed.

The first issue, documented by several media outlets after the topic came up at a Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board hearing in Carlsbad, is WIPP's inability to fill vacancies. Citing Carlsbad's remoteness, a housing shortage and a high cost of living, the Department of Energy and its management contractor, Nuclear Waste Partnership, have both complained of difficulties filling key spots in the lineup.

WIPP is not alone. Carlsbad, the fastest growing community in the state, has been bursting at its seams for several years. Other local employers have voiced a similar concern about a wide variety of jobs.

The second concern, more nuanced but just as troubling, is the seeming divide between the old guard and the new at the WIPP site. This has caused

morale issues, at least according to some long-time employees of the site, who have expressed private concerns about what appears to be a gulf between the two groups. Many of the managers at WIPP are transplants who plan to work at the facility for only a short time, while the rank and file employees tend to have roots in Carlsbad.

This is, to some degree, unavoidable. Many positions at the facility require a specific skill set, and newcomers to this community who bring their expertise and ideas are always welcome, as are experienced hands. And, as noted above, WIPP is largely concerned with filling vacancies. On an individual basis, bringing in new blood is a positive.

However, concerns about an air of colonialism should not be ignored. One selling point of WIPP has always been that WIPP's management is very trusting of the safety of the project and is willing to move family here. Many of WIPP's

newer managers have been honest about the fact that they are here on a short-term assignment and are not moving their family to the Carlsbad area. The loss of Carlsbad Field Office Manager Joe Franco, a Carlsbad native who previously worked on the project, compounds this concern.

The issue of filling vacancies and the issue of closing the gap between WIPP's two groups of employees are actually related.

First, we believe the Department of Energy and the Nuclear Waste Partnership should redouble efforts to find and promote talented individuals who have been involved with the project, or who have strong ties to Carlsbad.

We also believe that we, as a community, share the burden when it comes to WIPP's employment woes. It's up to us to help do what we can to get housing prices more affordable here, and we can also do more to make our short term visitors

See EMPLOYMENT on the next page

Settlement the Right Call for All

New Mexico Governor Susana Martinez, New Mexico Environment Department Secretary Ryan Flynn and the Department of Energy are all to be credited for piecing together an eloquent and carefully-crafted settlement related to the permit violations associated with the February 2014 fire and separate radiological incidents at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant.

Under the terms of the settlement agreement, instead of paying fines, the Department of Energy will provide about \$73 million in support for a variety of mutually beneficial and critical projects that will protect local communities and better safeguard transportation routes in New Mexico and around DOE sites.

It is, succinctly, the optimal resolution for a difficult situation. It's a resolution that makes the severity of the issue clear, but does not cripple WIPP's recovery effort. Most importantly, the settlement fees will be used to remedy safety issues in northern and southern New Mexico.

For the state, Governor Martinez and Secretary Flynn appear strong, safety conscious and responsible to our citizens. The state spent a significant amount of time meeting with elected officials and residents in the areas near where the violations took place. It's worth noting that the state negotiated a \$73 million deal- about \$20 million more than the original proposed fine.

For the Department of Energy, agreeing to support specific safety-related projects instead of just paying a fine is a way to not open the door to cash-strapped states who simply decide they want to hold a fundraiser. The projects, such as improving roads near WIPP, all benefit the DOE's own goals. The state is content, which means it will be receptive to responsible permit modification requests in the future.

For the taxpayer: There's
See SETTLEMENT on the next page

Los Alamos Still Avoiding Reality

Visit the Los Alamos National Laboratory web site and find the portion of the site that focuses on waste cleanup or articles that mention last year’s radiological release. We’ll wait. In fact, visit the Los Alamos web site and find a reference to the May 3 electrical accident at the Los Alamos site.

It may be there, somewhere, but we were unable to locate a news release or any information about this accident at the LANL.gov web site on May 5, outside of the web site’s technical reading room.

Instead, the Los Alamos web site celebrates articles about portable MRIs, quantum conferences and the lab’s leadership role in national endeavors. Press release after press release on the web site tout the scientific miracles being performed on a daily basis.

Los Alamos is one of the world’s leading laboratories, attracting some of the world’s best and brightest scientists to unlock the secrets of

the universe. Los Alamos is accomplishing some amazing things and has every right to celebrate these accomplishments.

But, we can’t help but wonder if the site’s finely-crafted online persona is indicative of a troubling level of escapism. The lab, at an admittedly cursory glance of its web image, seems uninterested in bringing itself down to items so gauche as accidents, investigations and waste cleanup. The visual is of an elitist unwilling to sink down to the level of messy or mundane subjects.

Sure, all groups, even those funded by the taxpayer, will present themselves in the best way possible, but the gap between image and reality with Los Alamos seems especially striking. Los Alamos doesn’t just focus on its most compelling content- it flat out ignores providing information on anything that does not fit that image.

The very first button that pops up on the British Petroleum web site, for comparison, is a site

about the Gulf of Mexico’s restoration effort. The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant’s web page is now devoted almost exclusively to the recovery effort. Los Alamos National Laboratory was largely responsible for the greatest fine levied by a state against the Department of Energy in history- but you can’t find any of that on the LANL web page.

As the old saying goes, those who don’t learn from history are doomed to repeat it, and Los Alamos’ unwillingness to admit to any dirt beneath its fingernails causes some concern that mistakes will be repeated. It also suggests that safety is not a top priority.

Taxpayer-funded Los Alamos National Laboratory should balance its message to focus less on public relations and more on public information.

CEMRC PRESS RELEASE

Monitoring Center Adds Three More Ambient Air Stations to Region

Following the February 14, 2014, underground radiation release event at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP), scientists at the Carlsbad Environmental Monitoring and Research Center (CEMRC) saw a need to expand their ambient air monitoring capabilities in order to provide additional information to area residents in the event of a future radiation release event. Historically, the CEMRC has operated three ambient air monitoring stations – all located on or near the WIPP facility, with one being located within the WIPP site boundary, one located approximately ½ mile northwest of the facility and one located approximately 12 miles southeast of the facility.

With support from the U.S. Department of Energy’s Carlsbad Field Office, the CEMRC has now added three additional ambient air sampling stations to its environmental monitoring program

with one located behind the CEMRC facility in Carlsbad, one located on the south side of Loving, and one located on the east side of the WIPP facility.

The addition of these new monitoring stations will help provide area residents and the scientific community with better information in terms of establishing the level of “normal” or background radioactivity present in the ambient air near these new locations, as well as provide additional detection capabilities in the event of another release at the WIPP facility in the future.

For more information regarding the Carlsbad Environmental Monitoring and Research Center’s independent environmental monitoring program, visit our website www.cemrc.org or call CEMRC Director, Dr. Russell Hardy at (575) 234-5555.



EMPLOYMENT continued from page 1

feel so welcome that they decide to move here for the long haul. We have a lot to sell. We have two national parks, a beautiful beach, an excellent school system and an energetic population. WIPP’s transplants have been among our community leaders for many years- and plenty of them came down here for what they thought

was a two-year tour and wound up liking it so much that they’ve stayed. Are our potential hires or temporary newcomers seeing all that the area has to offer?

Or are they going from their overpriced hotel to work and back again? And are we reaching out to them? WIPP’s newcomers, WIPP’s old guard and the community all need to do more

to improve on the connection between the three groups, be it through mixers, bowling leagues, group hunting trips or simply having more conversations. We hope WIPP’s long term employees are always valued for their tremendous efforts over the years.

It’s what is best for the project, and it is the right thing to do.

SETTLEMENT continued from page 1

no ideal way to resolve a dispute between the federal government and state government, but the worst possible solution would have been a lengthy legal battle. Road improvements and improvements to water systems are tangible quality of life issues, and an organized review system will help make sure future mistakes are not made.

Additional positives:

- The settlement does not change the scope or balance of power between the state and the federal government, and instead seems to recognize the important relationship between the two entities.
- The residents of communities

near the two facilities were directly involved in the discussion process.

- The money is not coming out of the operating budget at WIPP and LANL
- The money is also not going to the state general fund, where it would have vanished and not been focused on appropriate projects.

In fact, the only individuals to voice any complaint about the terms of the settlement have been a handful of the career opponents to all things nuclear, who have indicated a vague objection, voiced through their mouthpiece at the *Santa Fe New Mexican*, effectively stating “that those communities who sometimes support nuclear projects made suggestions, so therefore

those suggestions must be bad.”

On the contrary, suggesting that funds go toward improving transportation routes and water infrastructure is civically responsible.

We are hesitant to get caught up in heaping too much praise. After all, praising a multi-million dollar settlement for a series of errors is a little bit like praising a well-written will. Still, coming to an amiable settlement was a responsible decision that shows the clear value of the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant.

The Carlsbad Mayor’s Nuclear Task Force commends the Department of Energy and the State of New Mexico for reaching a responsible resolution that has the best interests of New Mexico citizens in mind.