

WM2013 Conference Panel Report

PANEL SESSION 38: Realigning TRU Disposal Priorities in the Aftermath of One of New Mexico's Worst Wildfire Disasters

Co-Chairs: **Terry Wickland**, *Senior Vice President, NFT*
J.R. Stroble, *Director of National TRU Program, US DOE CBFO*

Panel Reporter: **Terry Wickland**, *Senior Vice President, NFT*

Panelists:

1. **F. David Martin**, *Secretary, New Mexico Environment Department*
2. **Ralph Phelps**, *Chairman, Northern New Mexico Citizen's Advisory Board*
3. **Dave Nickless**, *Project Manager, DOE NNSA Los Alamos Field Office*
4. **Joe Franco**, *Manager, DOE Carlsbad Field Office*
5. **Dan Cox**, *Director of TRU Programs, Los Alamos National Security*

About 45 people attended this panel session which focused on the collaboration between the Department of Energy, New Mexico Environment Department (NMED), the contractor and the citizens of Northern New Mexico to accelerate shipments of transuranic waste from Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP). The session opened with five panelists presenting their perspectives on the framework agreement, integration of the community, realignment of waste shipment priorities, and DOE's support of the mission from the Carlsbad Field Office (CBFO) and execution of what has become known as the 3706 Campaign.

Collaboration was cited as one of the keys to success of a program to accelerate shipment of transuranic waste from Los Alamos National Laboratory to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant at a panel discussion yesterday.

"Removing this waste from Los Alamos is a win for everyone," said New Mexico Environment Department Secretary F. David Martin. "It's a win for the state and a win for communities."

Martin was one of the speakers on a panel that discussed "Realigning TRU Disposal Priorities in the Aftermath of One of New Mexico's Worst Wildfires." Other panel members were David Nickless, legacy waste manager for environmental projects, DOE Los Alamos Field Office; Ralph Phelps, chair of the Northern New Mexico Citizens Advisory Board; Joe Franco, manager of the Carlsbad Field Office; and Dan Cox, Deputy Associate Director of Environmental Programs at Los Alamos National Lab.

The Laboratory began a campaign to remove 3,706 cubic meters of above-ground TRU waste after a major wildfire ravaged more than 150,000 acres in 2011 and came to within a few miles of Area G, where Los Alamos stores transuranic waste. After the fire, New Mexico Governor Susana Martinez made removing the waste one of the state's highest environmental priorities.

In fiscal year 2012, the first year of the campaign, Los Alamos shattered all of its own shipping records.

WM2013 Conference Panel Report

“Collaboration between NMED, DOE, LANL and WIPP has been one of the key elements of the campaign’s success,” Nickless said.

Summary of Presentations

F. David Martin led off the panel presentations by describing the Regulatory Framework Agreement and established that the New Mexico Environment Department has two priorities, WIPP and Environmental Cleanup at LANL. After providing a brief history of WIPP and LANL, Secretary Martin described New Mexico Governor Susana Martinez priorities for environmental cleanup at LANL, which was significantly accelerated due to the June 2, 2011 Las Conchas Fire that burned more than 150 acres and came within 3.5 miles of the waste burial ground known as Area G. Governor Martinez tasked NMED to work with DOE and LANL to re-prioritize and address the greatest risks including disposal of above ground TRU legacy waste, groundwater protection, and surface water protection. The resulting document, known as the *Framework Agreement* rescheduled activities based on risks and focused on TRU waste. The 3706 campaign requires above ground TRU waste is shipped to WIPP by June 2014, and plan for buried TRU waste was established by December 2012 and followed by quarterly progress reviews. In conclusion, Secretary Martin cited that the partnership and increased cooperation between the NNSA, DOE, NMED and Northern New Mexico’s citizens has enabled unprecedented cleanup.

Ralph Phelps described community involvement from citizens of Northern New Mexico. Mr. Phelps stated that the agreements made between DOE and NMED were made public and a special Northern New Mexico Citizen Advisory Board Meeting was held on January 5, 2012. The public’s response at this meeting demonstrated broad community support for the Governor’s initiatives.

Dave Nickless provided more detail and milestones that are part the Framework Agreement. He detailed the two priorities surrounding the accelerated removal of TRU waste and groundwater and surface water protection. Mr. Nickless cited the ‘Core Team’ approach that included NMED, DOE –EM, DOE NNSA, LANL Field Office and Los Alamos National Security (LANS) a contractor. Sub Teams were formed to work on specific issues with a particular area of focus; that is the Core Team focused on developing the Framework Agreement, a ‘Tiger Team’ was tasked with solving environmental cleanup technical issues and the ‘FY12 Team’ reprioritized FY12 work based on the new risk reduction approach. Mr. Nickless also described other key elements such as assuring that funding for the 3706 Campaign is sufficient to meet annual deliverable and to support surface and groundwater protection. Mr. Nickless reiterated that this partnership has led to unprecedented cleanup progress, public engagement, decreased risks, and that the cleanup project is ahead of schedule. Mr. Nickless concluded by stating that is the best relationship to date that DOE has had with NMED.

Joe Franco described DOE CBFOs support of the LANL Mission and also reported WIPP had established the necessary capabilities to support receiving waste from LANL. Some of these capabilities include expanded characterization capability, redundant Non Destructive Assay, and high Energy Real Time Radiography. New initiatives for newly generated waste at LANL include dedicated visual examination personnel, progress toward characterization, certification

WM2013 Conference Panel Report

and shipping of classified TRU waste from TA – 55. Mr. Franco concluded by describing a new TRU waste facility that is in the final design phase and expected to be built at LANL.

Dan Cox expressed his agreement over the success of the collaboration between NMED, NNSA, CBFO and the citizens and while emphasizing the commitment to safety that LANL workers embrace every day. Mr. Cox showed the Operations Plan that drives the scheduled shift, operations and shipments since FY 2012. Although they are in mid-campaign Mr. Cox demonstrated the significant increases to resources including increased shifts, drum venting, redundant loading, increased radiography and super high efficiency neutron counters. To date, 1,173 cubic meters of TRU waste have been removed and shipped to WIPP. Risks are reduced due to decreasing plutonium equivalent curies (PE Ci) being shipped from LANL to WIPP. In fact, it was shown that in October 2008, nearly 95,000 PE Ci of TRU waste was stored above ground at LANL, compared to now when there are approximately 45,000 PE Ci and down to 30,000 by 2014. Mr. Cox concluded with the project approach, collaboration, and production modeling have all contributed significantly to this unprecedented disposal of TRU waste.

Questions and Answers

There was only one question for the Panelists. Mike Nartaker of the Weapons Complex Monitor asked the panelist's what impact would there be as a result of government sequestration. Dan Cox answered by stating the he and his team have already begun discussions with his counterparts from DOE and NMED. Mr. Cox stated that in the event of sequestration, they would meet again and begin addressing where appropriate budgets cuts could be made. He stated their priority is to assure ground water safety. Joe Franco added that the WIPP facility was prepared to provide whatever support LANL needed to meet the shipping priorities.