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EPA to issue permits for Los Alamos storm water runoff

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LOS ALAMOS, N.M. (AP) — New Mexico officials are planning another public meeting focused on the state's oversight and scientific monitoring of environmental impacts at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

The Environment Department has scheduled the next meeting for Jan. 9 at the University of New Mexico campus in Los Alamos. The focus will be a 2016 agreement the state signed with the U.S. Energy Department regarding the cleanup of contamination and other responsibilities of the lab.

"The Los Alamos community asked for this discussion on the Los Alamos National Laboratory Consent Order and we listened," Environment Secretary James Kenney said in a statement Tuesday. "Collaborating with stakeholders is essential to protecting public health and the environment."

The order spells out milestones the lab needs to meet with its cleanup campaigns and establishes corrective actions for the release of hazardous wastes or groundwater contamination.

Watchdogs have been critical of the pace of cleanup projects at the northern New Mexico lab. Earlier this year, environmental groups filed a federal lawsuit over water pollution downstream from the lab. The groups asked the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to issue a permit that would specifically regulate urban stormwater runoff from developed areas at the lab, the town of Los Alamos and the nearby community of White Rock.

According to the lawsuit and data from the state Environment Department, excess levels of mercury, silver, copper, zinc, nickel, polychlorinated biphenyls and gross alpha radiation are entering local waterways through runoff.

Puerto Rico earthquake caught on camera

The EPA just weeks ago issued a final determination that stormwater discharges from the lab and Los Alamos County are contributing to violations of water quality standards and that discharges must be controlled and regulated under an EPA-issued permit.

Rachel Conn, projects director with Amigos Bravos, said regulating and controlling discharges will protect drinking water sources for both Santa Fe and Albuquerque because some of the canyons that feed into the Rio Grande run through lab property.

Andrew Hawley, an attorney with the Western Environmental Law Center, said her group hopes the EPA moves quickly to issue permits that include all of the legally required limits to protect people and wildlife in Los Alamos and downstream.

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