

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NNSA Extends public comment period for Biosafety Lab proposal

The public comment period for a proposal to construct and operate a Biological Safety Level 3 Laboratory (BSL-3) at Los Alamos National Laboratory has been extended for thirty days, the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) announced today.

Corey Cruz, acting director of the NNSA's Office of Los Alamos Site Operations, said the extension begins December 17, 2001, and ends January 15, 2002. Comments received by NNSA within that period will be considered prior to completion of the final environmental assessment (EA) of the proposed project.

A predecisional draft EA that analyzes the potential environmental consequences of implementing the proposed action and its alternatives was issued on October 29, 2001. The EA is available to the public at the NNSA Los Alamos Community Involvement and Outreach Office, 1619 Central Avenue in Los Alamos, and in Albuquerque at the Government Information Department of the University of New Mexico's Zimmerman Library.

The proposed lab would be used in development and evaluation of technologies such as sensors that can detect biological agents in the air or on the ground and laser-based systems that can quickly identify an outbreak of an unusual disease in animals or humans.

After the close of the comment period, the Office of Los Alamos Site Operations Acting Director will determine whether the EA analysis supports a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) or whether the NNSA will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). A decision on the issuance of a FONSI and a final EA or the preparation of an EIS will be made by the end of February 2002. Issuance of a final EA and FONSI, should that be the course of action decided upon, would occur at that time. If there is a decision to prepare an EIS, that process typically takes one to two years to complete.

Comments should be sent to the attention of Elizabeth Withers, NEPA Compliance Officer, Office of Los Alamos Site Operations, 528 35th St., Los Alamos, NM, 87544. Comments may also be sent electronically to: ewithers@doeal.gov or they may be made orally by calling Ms. Withers at (505) 667-8690.

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