Enclosure 8

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Los Alamos
NATIONAL LABORATORY

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Date: September 3, 1998
In Reply Refer To: ESH-18/WQ&H:98-0286
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Ms. Phyllis Bustamante
Ground Water Quality Bureau
New Mexico Environment Department
P.O. Box 26110
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87502

SUBJECT: SUMMARY OF JULY 31, 1998, MEETING AT LANL AND STATUS REPORT ON RLWTF UPGRADES

Dear Ms. Bustmante:

We would like to take this opportunity to review for you the key points from the July 31, 1998, meeting which you and Mr. John Gillentine (NMED) attended at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

The principal items on the agenda at the July 31, 1998, meeting were the presentations by David Rogers (ESH-18) on the hydrogeology of Mortandad Canyon, and by David Broxton (EES-1) and Pat Longmire (CST-7) on the recent findings from the drilling of wells R-9 and R-12. Plans for the proposed drilling of well R-15 (Mortandad Canyon) were also reviewed. Under the current schedule, drilling at R-15 will begin in September 1998. Please direct any additional questions you may have regarding these presentations to Bob Beers and he will forward them to the appropriate presenter.

Following the above presentations, Neil Williams (ESH-18) described for you and Mr. Gillentine the problems which the Laboratory is currently encountering with SKF, Inc., the vendor for the Phase II biodenitrification equipment. SKF, Inc. is unable to meet its contractual obligations and deliver the required equipment. As a result, due to circumstances beyond the Laboratory's control, completion of the Phase II upgrades has been delayed despite substantial expenditures and the Laboratory's efforts to remain on schedule.

Neil Williams also provided you with a copy of the Laboratory's recent report, "Elimination of Liquid Discharge to the Environment from the TA-50 Radioactive Liquid Waste Treatment Facility" (Moss, D., Williams, N., et al., LA-13452-MS, LANL, June 1998). The report presents conceptual level recommendations for future upgrades to the Radioactive Liquid Waste Treatment Facility (RLWTF) and at the generating sites which would allow the Laboratory to implement a complete reuse or evaporation of the treated radioactive liquid waste (RLW) resulting in a zero liquid discharge of RLW effluent.

The Phase I process upgrades (ultrafiltration and reverse osmosis) to the RLWTF have been installed. Recently, several safety concerns have been identified by the plant's operators which can be corrected through modifications to the Phase I equipment. The Laboratory has determined that in order to minimize potential exposure to radioactive liquids, these modifications should be completed and tested before the Phase I upgrades are placed into services with RLW. As a result, the Phase I upgrades will not be treating RLW until January 1999.

Over the past weeks, DOE and Laboratory management have met to address the Phase II upgrades (nitrate removal) and compliance with state ground water standards. Both DOE and Laboratory management are in agreement that due to the recommendations made in the report, alternatives to biodenitrification should be considered for nitrate removal if they will enable the Laboratory to pursue zero liquid discharge in the near future. As a result, the Laboratory has initiated an engineering study to evaluate the alternatives available to reach both the short-term objective of nitrate compliance and the ultimate goal of zero liquid discharge. The completion date for the Phase II upgrades cannot be projected until this engineering study is completed. Preparation of the study is expected to take six to eight weeks. Most importantly, senior DOE and Laboratory management have made commitments to allocate the resources necessary to provide implementation of nitrate removal at the RLWTF at the earliest possible date.

In closing, we have been asked by senior management at DOE and the Laboratory to request a meeting with management from the NMED Ground Water Bureau. The objective of the meeting would be to discuss the issues presented in this letter and to communicate the Laboratory's commitment to accelerate the completion date for the Phase II upgrades.

Please contact Bob Beers of the Water Quality and Hydrology Group at 667-7969 if you would like further information on these matters.

Sincerely,

Steve Hanson
Radioactive Liquid Waste Operations

Sincerely,

Steven Rae
Water Quality and Hydrology Group

BB/md

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