



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AND THE WINNER IS: LOS ALAMOS NATIONAL LABORATORY
NEW MEXICO ENVIRONMENTAL LAW CENTER ANNOUNCES TOXIC TURKEY AWARD

SANTA FE, N.M. — The New Mexico Environmental Law Center bestowed its annual Toxic Turkey Award to Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) for nearly six decades of polluting the human and natural environment and continuous violations of basic principles of environmental justice.

The Law Center awards the Toxic Turkey Award to a person or group that has shown extraordinary disregard for New Mexico's environment and the communities that live in it. The Law Center presented the award at its annual Member Appreciation Party in Santa Fe on December 8.

In announcing the award, staff attorney Jon Block pointed to the origins of LANL in the Manhattan Project to develop the first atomic weapons. The federal government expropriated the sacred places of the people of the San Ildefonso and Santa Clara Pueblos as an isolated location for the secret laboratory. In the following decades, LANL dumped hazardous chemical, metal and radioactive waste into arroyos running off the Pajarito Plateau and into hundreds of unlined pits and trenches within the Lab's boundary, all of which will eventually contaminate the drinking water aquifer and the Rio Grande.

Internal LANL documents show that at least as early as 1949, Lab scientists wrote to management regarding their concerns that the Lab's waste-dumping practices would contaminate groundwater and the Rio Grande. The Lab did not curtail those activities until passage of the federal Clean Water Act and the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency in the early 1970s and is still operating its Radioactive Liquid Waste Treatment Facility—a major source of pollution – without a Hazardous Waste Permit.

In addition to the Toxic Turkey award, the Law Center also gave several awards to organizations or individuals who have been champions for water protection, environmental protection, and community advocacy. Two of those awards also reflected on LANL's egregious record.

Tewa Women United was awarded the Jeanne Gauna Community Environmental Advocacy Award for New Mexicans who have given significant time and effort toward grassroots advocacy for the welfare of our state's communities, especially through the linkage of environmental health and community well-being. In particular, Kathy Sanchez, her husband Gilbert Sanchez, and their daughter Corrine Sanchez, were recognized for 30 years of representing a frontline community in the fight to protect sacred lands and the health of downstream communities and the environment.

Joni Arends, long-time Executive Director of Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety (CCNS), received the Griff Salisbury Environmental Protection Award as an outstanding individual who has made significant contributions to the protection of New Mexico's Environment. For nearly four decades, Ms. Arends has been a leading voice against the nuclear weapons complex in New Mexico, including LANL, Sandia National Laboratories, and the Waste Isolation Pilot Project (WIPP). Ms. Arends was the original co-Director of Communities for Clean Water (CCW), of which Tewa Women United is also a member. CCW sued LANL for its stormwater management practices. The action led to a settlement that provided support for independent technical experts to work with LANL-impacted communities in commenting on LANL permits and other activities.

Norman Gaume, former director of the Interstate Stream Commission, received the Karl Souder Water Protection Award, which honors an outstanding individual or organization that has made significant contributions to the protection of New Mexico water. Mr. Gaume has been a leader in the efforts to prevent his former agency from moving forward with expensive and unrealistic plans to divert water from the Gila River rather than implementing community-based plans that would preserve the Gila. Mr. Gaume has also helped the Law Center's work with its clients opposed to the proposed Santolina mega-development on the West Mesa of Albuquerque and recently wrote extensive comments against using produced water outside the oil and gas industry.

Douglas Meiklejohn, Executive Director of the New Mexico Environmental Law Center, said "The Law Center is proud to work with these organizations and individuals and to represent them in their efforts to force recalcitrant companies and agencies to be accountable to the people of New Mexico. Water is one of the most precious resources in our state, and Tewa Women United, Joni Arends and Norman Gaume are outstanding and inspiring examples of environmental and environmental justice activism to protect the water on which all New Mexicans depend."

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Tewa Women United - <http://tewawomenunited.org>
Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety - <http://nuclearactive.org>