

LANL GETS UNAUTHORIZED ANTHRAX SHIPMENT

Los Alamos National Laboratory has confirmed a report from the Project on Government Oversight that the lab received a shipment containing an unauthorized anthrax DNA sample.

POGO charged that a shipment of anthrax had arrived at LANL from a facility at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Ariz. LANL's Human Research Lab did receive on Oct. 26 such a sample identified as "virulent," or potentially live, on the accompanying shipping document, lab officials acknowledged Wednesday.

As a Biosafety Level-2 lab, LANL's Human Research Lab is not authorized to handle virulent anthrax samples. To work with live anthrax, a lab must be designated a BSL-3 facility — which operates under stricter safeguards than a BSL-2 lab — or have an exception permit from or registration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. LANL did not have a registration or exception permit to receive virulent anthrax, a lab representative said. LANL is seeking to build a BSL-3 level facility (related story on page 7).

"This incident did not at any point involve any safety

(continued on page 10)

LANL GETS UNAUTHORIZED ANTHRAX SHIPMENT begins on page 1

risk to laboratory workers, the public or the environment. This issue is one of procedural compliance related to shipping documentation," said Jill Trehwella, leader of LANL's bioscience division. The lab has been providing anthrax DNA analysis to federal agencies investigating the recent anthrax attacks through the mail.

"As soon as it was received at Los Alamos, standard safety handling procedures were employed to ensure complete destruction of any live organisms. All extracted DNA samples received at Los Alamos are handled on the assumption that they are infectious," lab officials said.

LANL said its standard handling procedures include filter sterilization and thermal destruction of packaging and filtrate material, and that the lab used these procedures on the virulent anthrax sample it received. Tests conducted after these procedures were carried out confirmed that the package contained no residual organisms, lab representatives said.

POGO investigators discovered the anthrax shipment information, which the group had not confirmed, as part of its continuing investigation into what POGO called "serious security vulnerabilities at Los Alamos and the nation's nine other major facilities that store nuclear-weapons grade plutonium and highly-enriched uranium."

The incident has prompted LANL and NNSA to review procedures for handling shipments of extracted DNA samples. The lab expects to report its findings within 30 days. — *David Jones*