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# New burners for wilderness fuel mitigation efforts

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LOS ALAMOS, N.M., Sept. 13, 2001 -- The U.S. Department of Energy's Los Alamos National Laboratory next week plans to begin employing special equipment to safely burn thousands of tons of wood without producing large amounts of smoke and particulate matter.

The Lab will begin using new "air-curtain destructors" to safely and cleanly burn piles of downed trees, stumps and slash from forest thinning projects located near the Lab's southern boundary. The newly employed burners work similarly to low-emission "pellet stoves" by blowing a curtain of air over materials as they burn within a semi-enclosed environment. The fan-driven curtain of air introduces a steady oxygen supply into the fuel and helps ensure that nearly all fuel and gases are consumed. The machines can burn up to 20 tons of wood an hour and produce about one tenth of the smoke and particulate material that is normally produced by traditional open burning. What's more, the machines are safe — burning all material within deep trenches or an open-top fire box.

In addition to helping solve wood-disposal problems in an environmentally-friendly manner, the decision to use the air-curtain destructors helped with the Laboratory's on-going efforts to stimulate business activity in Northern New Mexico. The Laboratory has entered into a contract with Anvil Welding Enterprises of Hernandez, N.M., for wood burning and related services associated with wildfire mitigation activities. The one-year, renewable contract with Anvil Welding Enterprises is worth approximately \$1.6 million.

After the May 2000 Cerro Grande Fire, which burned nearly 8,000 acres of Laboratory property, Laboratory officials accelerated an aggressive wildfire prevention

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plan that includes thinning thousands of acres of Laboratory property. The areas are badly overgrown and rife with so-called ladder fuels, which allow flames to reach tree canopies and create dangerous "crown-fire" conditions.

Crews have thinned numerous trees, shrubs and other vegetation in accordance with the wildfire prevention plan. A large amount of wood from these thinning efforts remains at Technical Area 16, so crews will begin using the new burners in that area first while thinning efforts continue at other areas of the Laboratory.

Once crews finish burning downed wood and slash from the TA-16 area, they will move to other areas to dispose of thinned trees and slash. Under the current operating plan, crews will begin stoking up the burners in the morning and will continue operating them non-stop for the entire day, if possible. Burning operations may be suspended due to unfavorable weather or operational conditions. Because of the configuration and operational nature of the burning machines, crews can curtail combustion quickly if in-progress burns need to be suspended.

Members of the public may notice small amounts of smoke from time to time in association with the burning activities. Personnel in the Laboratory's Air Quality Group will monitor all emissions to ensure that the Laboratory doesn't exceed any federal, state or local air-quality standards. The TA-16 burn plan has been reviewed by safety personnel, regulators from the New Mexico Environment Department, and by Laboratory and Los Alamos County fire officials.

"Current DOE policy dictates that we cannot conduct open burning on Laboratory property, and yet we still are faced with a situation where we must dispose of tons of wood from fire mitigation efforts," said Steve Mee, manager for environmental activities in the Laboratory's Cerro Grande Fire Rehabilitation Project Office.

"When we looked at air-curtain destructors, we saw how safe, environmentally friendly, efficient and effective they were, so we knew that this was the way to go to dispose of wood that cannot be given away."

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