LANL installs additional protective measures

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LOS ALAMOS, New Mexico, July 20, 2011— Los Alamos National Laboratory work crews completed additional flood and erosion-control measures this week to reduce the environmental effects of any flash floods following the Las Conchas Fire.Crews installed concrete barriers to protect wellheads, utility poles, and underground natural gas lines in Los Alamos Canyon. They also installed sampling gauges on the Lab's western boundary to compare run-on water with run-off water and collected samples from fish at Cochiti Reservoir. Sampling is being coordinated with the New Mexico Environment Department and other agencies, and all results will be made public.Additional fish samples will be collected from the Rio Grande and at Cochiti Reservoir before and after the summer monsoons for comparison."We routinely collect fish and other species in the Rio Grande both upstream and downstream of the Laboratory and analyze them for radionuclides, metals, and organic compounds. This year, because of the fire, we'll collect additional samples to assess any possible risk," said Chris Echohawk, group

leader for the Lab's environmental surveillance program. "There was no increase in radionuclides in fish after the Cerro Grande Fire, but we wanted to collect the samples both before and after any flooding events to assess chemicals such as mercury and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). We expect to measure fire products similar to any western forest fire."Lab crews have already installed flood and erosion control measures, including 600 feet of water diversion barriers, and removed more than 1,200 cubic yards of sediment. They also diverted water from sediment collection ponds at the bottom of Los Alamos Canyon and removed close to 100 containers of waste soil, debris, and protective clothing from environmental investigation sites in canyon bottoms."These measures are aimed at protecting the environment and inhibiting the flow of sediments," said Kevin Smith, manager of the National Nuclear Security Administration's Los Alamos Site Office. "The Lab has combined lessons learned from the Cerro Grande Fire with its considerable expertise to minimize the impact post-fire flooding could have on the environment."The Laboratory officially declared a return to normal operations on July 15.Investigation or cleanup of Cold War-era waste sites is taking place under the Consent Order, a 2005 agreement between the Department of Energy, LANL, and the state of New Mexico. Of more than 2,100 environmental sites in existence in 2005, about 800 remain, ranging in size from a small, suspected fuel spill to multi-acre landfills. None of the large sites is in a canyon bottom.

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