

Security raises concerns with UC contract

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When the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) releases its security review of the Department of Energy laboratories on Sept. 5, the potential language of the review may have significant repercussions regarding the University of California's future role in managing Los Alamos National Laboratory.

If the recommendations of the newly formed security agency, led by Gen. John Gor-

don, are in conflict with the university's stated position in regards to lab security, the review may drive a philosophical wedge between the

NNSA and UC, making the future of the contract unknown.

Despite these weighty concerns, UC spokesman Rick Malaspina feels that such a reaction is a worst case sce-

nario, given the collaborative nature of the discussions that are occurring throughout the month of August between high-ranking UC

personal and Gordon and his staff.

The purpose of the meetings, according to

Malaspina, is to discuss the fragile security situation, possible modifications to the con-

tract and UC's potential role in managing security. Because of the implications of the talks, Malaspina said that specific issues are being "held closely," but the nature of the talks is rather inclusive.

"Everything is on the table," Malaspina said, "It has to be in a DOE driven process."

Malaspina denied that the meetings involve actual negotiations but are rather a "discussion process held in a frank atmosphere."

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**Rick Malaspina
Spokesperson, University of California**

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CONTRACT

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"There is a real spirit to work together on a complex problem," said Malaspina, who serves as UC's manager for public affairs regarding the university's administration of the laboratories.

While similar discussions between UC and the DOE regarding contract issues have taken place in the past, there is concern that there may be more severe consequences of the review completed by the newly created NNSA.

The key issue likely to be addressed in Gordon's review is the overall management of security at the lab and whether or not the University of California retains its current responsibility.

According to Malaspina, the university would not be adverse to engaging a subcontractor model for security management like the one that currently exist with lab's security force, Protection Technology Los Alamos.

However, if the NNSA requires that the security be managed by an equal third-party that would not report to the university's line management, Malaspina said that UC may not be interested in continuing the management contract that is up for renewal in September 2002.

"There is a need for clarity, consistency and accountability," Malaspina said, in regards to UC's position on security management.

In addition to requiring the need for line management, Malaspina

said there are two other security principles, in addition to the question of line management, that are essentially non-negotiable with the university.

The second principle outlines the need for a competent agency to manage security, if it was broken out from the existing system. Under a sub-contractor model, the selected contractor would need to be a "first-rate outfit" with a proven success record that would meet the university's standards, Malaspina said.

The final principle requires that the security management arrangement remain conducive to the environment for the highest quality science. According to Malaspina, university management is wary that security changes might create the type of environment that keeps people away.

"For the good of the labs, we have needs and have to hold to these basic principles," Malaspina said. He added that the university is not trying to diminish the seriousness of the lab's security situation, but rather work towards a resolution that does not diminish the lab's ability to conduct the highest caliber science.

A further concern for UC officials is that the potential outcome of the decisions reached by Gordon's staff might lead to a competitive bidding of the university's long-standing contract with the Department of Energy. The university has made it clear that they would not participate in a competitive bid situation, pre-

ferring to end their nearly 60 year relationship with Los Alamos.

"UC would not be able to compete in a competitive bid," Malaspina said. "That has been the one steadfast element with the labs all along." UC also manages the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and Berkeley National Laboratory, both DOE institutions in California.

He added, "Historically, UC has managed the labs as a public service at the government's request. If the government seeks to alter (the contract) it would change the nature of why the University of California manages the lab."

The potential risk of losing the presence of UC in Los Alamos has produced a groundswell of spoken support for the university from throughout the region.

At their regularly scheduled meeting next week, the Los Alamos County Council will be considering a proclamation supporting the extension of the UC contract. Concurrently, the Los Alamos business community has launched a support campaign including petitions, letters and an education campaign on what happens to a DOE-supported community when a major contract change occurs.

The activity is not limited to Los Alamos County. In Rio Arriba County, a petition drive is already under way and the local government has issued a proclamation in support of continuing the UC's role at the lab.

Recently, several leaders from the tri-county area met in Los Alamos at the invitation of the Los Alamos County Chamber of Commerce to discuss a potential visit to Washington D.C. to meet with Gordon and offer support for the university.

Malaspina points out that the current security concerns are not the first time the university had to be flexible and respond to contract-threatening issues. In 1992, the DOE was disappointed in the lab's performance in a number of basic business functions.

According to Malaspina, the UC responded with a number of significant changes in lab's business operations, which now saves over \$150 million a year among the three laboratories they manage.

"We are confident that we can address the serious concerns that now exist," Malaspina said, "There may not be a need to renegotiate the contracts." He added that the lab's current security situation is a relatively recent concern. "Los Alamos has a long history of keeping tight security while maintaining a high level of science."

A decision on whether the contract will go out to bid is expected from the Secretary of Energy's office by March of next year. The current contract, which began in 1997 and ends in September 2002, has a feature to extend the contract for another five years without negotiations, if the DOE decides to do so.