



MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM
GOVERNOR

JAMES C. KENNEY
CABINET SECRETARY

August 25, 2023



Nancy Balkus, P.E., SES
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Environment, Safety, and Infrastructure
Department of the Air Force
1690 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330-1670

RE: Kirtland Air Force Base Corrective Action

Dear Deputy Assistant Secretary Balkus,

Thank you for your letter dated July 27, 2023 and graciously hosting us at the Pentagon on August 10, 2023 for our in-person meeting. While I truly believe we made progress earlier this month at our in-person meeting, I want to express my deep concern regarding the emails you brought to my attention. These emails were sent by a few employees of the Hazardous Waste Bureau (HWB) at the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) and are not representative of our values of science, innovation, collaboration, and compliance. It is disheartening to see that these emails of a few HWB employees draw inappropriate conclusions, driven by incomplete or inaccurate information and assumptions. What is also troubling is that these emails contain a series of serious allegations against U.S. Air Force (USAF) employees, various stakeholders, and NMED leadership to paint a concerning picture not grounded in fact. These emails do not represent the thoughtful discussions and well-considered choices that NMED leadership has made, especially regarding the USAF and the personnel at Kirtland Air Force Base (KAFB).

I assure you that these informal and problematic email exchanges do not reflect the views of NMED leadership or the majority of our professional, well-intentioned employees. Importantly, these employees and their views will not impede our progress in addressing the necessary corrective actions at KAFB. I speak for myself, my leadership team, and our employees when I say that NMED is committed to continuing productive discussions with you and your team.

To address this matter, NMED's Deputy Cabinet Secretary of Operations, Danielle Gilliam, who holds no conflict of interest in this matter, has taken the lead. She is actively addressing the allegations and personnel concerns, ensuring confidentiality throughout the process. Given the gravity of the allegations and the reported behavior, she has proactively engaged an independent third-party investigator to thoroughly examine the situation. We are committed to taking appropriate disciplinary and corrective measures based on the results of this investigation.

Please know that we are deeply committed to addressing this issue, maintaining transparency, and ensuring that our commitment to professionalism and progress remains unwavering. In terms of our corrective measures, NMED immediately took the following steps:

1. Secured a third-party contractor with significant environmental remediation experience to immediately begin the management of all technical corrective action at KAFB, including the



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review the USAF's three workplans submitted to us. In addition, NMED will utilize the third-party contractor to evaluate past data, including the six years of data previously deemed "unrepresentative," to determine if sufficient information has been collected to support a conceptual model to guide the corrective measures evaluation.

2. We agreed to evaluate a governance structure to elevate and resolve areas of technical disagreements. NMED is drafting a proposal for a governance structure that may include the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).
3. At your convenience, I would like to set up a call with the U.S. EPA Region 6 Regional Administrator, Dr. Earthea Nance, for the three of us to discuss U.S. EPA's involvement in the corrective action matter at KAFB.
4. Recommitting to improve our stakeholder engagement and build public confidence in our ability to safeguard our community. To that end, we are happy to support the USAF's efforts to engage with a local public relations firm to help with these efforts. We stand ready to participate in any public meetings or other opportunities to improve the public perception of these efforts.

From our entire team, I am grateful for your willingness to rebuild our relationship and do the tough work necessary to protect New Mexicans on- and off-base. Know that we stand ready to find opportunities to build consensus with you and your team.

Sincerely,

 Digitally signed by
James C. Kenney
Date: 2023.08.25
11:26:56 -06'00'

James C. Kenney
Cabinet Secretary