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PRESS RELEASE

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FORMER LANL EMPLOYEE SENTENCED **FOR STEALING IRRADIATED GOLD**

Earlier today, **Alex Maestas**, 46, a former employee of the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL), was sentenced in federal court in Albuquerque, New Mexico to a one-year term of imprisonment to be followed by three years supervised release by Senior United States District Judge C. LeRoy Hansen for stealing a two-ounce piece of gold, valued at approximately \$2,000, from a LANL processing facility. The gold, which was taken by Maestas on March 24, 2009, was contaminated with a small amount of americium and plutonium which rendered the gold radioactive. According to federal prosecutors, the radioactive plutonium in the gold posed a serious health risk because it could have proven deadly if inhaled or ingested.

Maestas was charged by indictment in October 2009 with theft of government property, a violation of 18 U.S.C. § 641, and with engaging in a prohibited transaction involving nuclear materials, a violation of 18 U.S.C. § 831, based on an investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Office of the Inspector General, U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). The investigation was initiated on March 24, 2009 after

DOE personnel responded to an alarm sounded by a contamination monitor as Maestas attempted to leave the LANL processing facility at which he was then employed with the gold in hand. Maestas entered a guilty plea to theft of government property on January 28, 2010. During his plea hearing, Maestas admitted to stealing the gold and knowing that "the gold was taken from an area that was used to store materials that contained plutonium and nuclear material."

During today's sentencing hearing, Assistant United States Attorney (AUSA) Fred Federici argued that, at the time he took the gold, Maestas knew that he potentially exposing the public to radioactive contamination that could cause death or serious bodily injury. AUSA Federici asked Judge Hansen to increase Maestas' term of imprisonment based on the fact that Maestas was clearly conscious of the serious risks associated with his improper removal of the gold.

United States Attorney Kenneth J. Gonzales said:

Everyone who works at LANL, no matter what job he or she holds, is entrusted with the important responsibility of safeguarding the property of the laboratory. When LANL employees help themselves to lab property, they violate that special trust. In this case, Maestas not only violated that special trust by taking gold used in LANL experiments, but did so knowing that the gold was contaminated and could have endangered the lives of his family, friends and neighbors. Fortunately, DOE personnel apprehended Maestas and recovered the gold before Maestas could endanger the lives of others, and they should be commended for their swift response to a potentially dangerous situation.

The case was prosecuted by AUSAs George C. Kraehe and Fred Federici.