

## **Drop Zone Group Presentation to the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology Board of Regents - February 19, 2008**

My name is Greg Miller and I am the spokesperson for the Drop Zone Group, an organizing committee for the Socorro City and County residents who are in opposition to some of the plans of the R&D Division of New Mexico Tech. I have been a resident of Socorro for over 10 years, and have earned three degrees at New Mexico Tech, where I was taught to be thorough and objective when investigating facts. I am not receiving compensation for my work for the Drop Zone Group.

**Introduction**

We are here to ask the Regents to closely examine activities by New Mexico Tech that we believe are in conflict with the Mission and Vision Statements of the University. Publically available information provides the necessary facts for everyone's consideration. We are providing documentation and information to you today that use only the words of Air Force and EMRTC to support our position.

**Purpose of presentation**

While this project is referred to as the "Drop Zone" that isn't the complete issue. A major concern, and one of many that we hope the Regents will examine, is that New Mexico Tech is proposing to establish an air-to-ground gunnery range for fee-paying clients. New Mexico Tech is inviting military and non-military aircraft to use civilian airspace west of M-Mountain in a manner that is usually confined to military installations such as White Sands. Establishing an aircraft training location with air-to-ground gunnery is a major change for New Mexico Tech.

**Air-to-ground gunnery is a major change in mission**

The community is unable to evaluate what impact the University proposals will have on us because of a lack of effective communication. There are many examples, but only one is necessary to illustrate the scope of the problem. Despite repeated requests, the public cannot even determine where the impacts are going to be. The public has repeatedly requested that a map be published defining the flight paths that will be taken to and from the drop zone. For over six months no map has been forthcoming. We don't feel that meets the New Mexico Tech mission to be a communicative neighbor. We would like the Regents to act to correct that specific problem in a timely manner.

**EMRTC communication has been poor**

There is a misconception that the Drop Zone is needed by the 58<sup>th</sup> SOW out of Kirtland Air Force base because they don't have a facility to conduct their training. The 2007 EMRTC Final Environmental Assessment states that: "Currently, the 58th SOW utilizes drop zones at the Roswell Airport, Isleta Drop Zone, and Centerfire Drop Zone. These locations pose problems both with location and logistics." The first part of that statement is true, the second part about problems, well, not so much. Why do I say that? The Air Force is critically aware of their training needs. The Air Force recognized over three years ago that the Roswell and Isleta drop zones did not meet their training mission and set about to establish the Centerfire Drop Zone to replace Roswell and Isleta. That is what the Air Force states in the Centerfire Final Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact. The Air Force states that Centerfire Drop Zone will meet their needs. That document states that: "The proposal addressed in this EA is a long term solution that will meet training requirements and funding restrictions."

**The 58<sup>th</sup> SOW does not need a new drop zone**

The Drop Zone Group has been in communication with the Air Force for several months and has made numerous inquiries for facts. At no time has the Air Force indicated to us that their Drop Zone training needs are not being met at the Centerfire facility. Moving existing 58<sup>th</sup> SOW training operations from Centerfire to Socorro will increase costs and travel time for the Air Force, not decrease them. The public is faced with conflicting messages, the 2007 EMRTC document that says that Air Force training needs are not being met, and the 2005 Air Force document and 2008 letter that say that they are. Given the value that the New Mexico Tech Mission and Vision Statements place on truthfulness and transparency we are asking the Regents to conduct their own investigation to determine if the EMRTC documents and public statements conform to those values.

**Conflicting messages cloud the truth**

At this time the Drop Zone Group believes the Air Force documents that state they are meeting their training needs. Once you get past the somewhat misleading idea that it is the Air Force that needs this drop zone, and the content about a drop zone is discarded from the document, what information is the University communicating to the community? The remaining information is that the University, through EMRTC, intends on establishing Special Use Airspace over state lands. We do not feel that it is proper, or transparent, or in line with the Mission and Vision Statements to separate the current invitation to the 58<sup>th</sup> SOW to relocate from the future invitation to "...other clients..." Clients that can and will "...conduct air operations including air-to-ground gunnery, drops, and other training operations" in the planned Special Use Airspace. The community is not going to be able to differentiate drop zone impacts from Special Use Airspace impacts. The result of both proposals will be the same to the community; increased and regular use of the airspace close to the City by military and non-military aircraft. We ask the Regents to evaluate whether the currently unquantifiable impact, and how it is being presented to the public, is indeed consistent with the high standards that the NMT Mission and Vision Statements aspire to.

**Drop zone and Special Use Airspace "clients" are cumulative impacts to the community**

In the 1980's a Quality Revolution was spreading through out American business and industry. Our national adoption of a culture of quality is one of the primary reasons that America is as productive and competitive as we are today. Mission and vision statements are part of that culture. Mission Statements are crafted with great care. They are tools used to meet institutional goals. Institutions use the mission statement, once created, as a "North Arrow" for evaluation of every institutional proposal. We are asking the Regents to carefully check their "North Arrow" with respect to the R&D Division Drop Zone and Special Use Airspace plans. From our outside perspective, we see misalignment between the R&D Division's actions and New Mexico Tech's mission. The proposed actions present substantial risks to the community. There is difficulty in obtaining full information about those risks. Transparency and service to the community are important parts of the mission of New Mexico Tech. We ask that the Regents review the EMRTC proposals in light of these community concerns. We thank you for the time and opportunity to address the Regents on this topic and welcome any questions you may have.

**Please keep NMT true to the values set forth in the Mission and Vision Statements**