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# Facility design may proceed

By Roger Snodgrass  
For The New Mexican

Officials at Los Alamos National Laboratory say they can advance the design phase of their multibillion dollar nuclear facility, while at the same time deciding where and what should be built.

"There are a lot of things we can do that don't prejudice the outcome," said Rick Holmes, division leader for the lab's Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement facility.

More information emerged during and after a public meeting Wednesday evening in Los Alamos.

Although it is only 22,500 square feet, the nuclear facility makes up the bulk of the CMRR project, and at \$4 billion or more, it may become the largest federal project in New Mexico history, apart from the interstate highways.

Jay Coghlan, executive director of Nuclear Watch New Mexico, asked officials if the project had a total cost yet. "No we don't," said Steve Fong, who heads the CMRR project for the Department of Energy.

In a presentation, Scott Kovac also of Nuclear Watch, illustrated one of the dimensions of the rising costs.

Including next year's budget, which has not yet been approved, \$420 million will have been appropriated for the design of the CMRR alone, with \$580 million in the plans through 2013. The estimate for the original design was \$55 million in 2003.

Not all has gone awry.

Fong said the first two phases of the project, the \$164 million radiological laboratory and the associated equipment installation, budgeted at \$199.4 million, are on course. The 19,500-square-foot Rad Lab is complete and the equipment project is under

way and ahead of schedule. The smaller of two buildings at the facility, the Rad Lab will be ready to be occupied by a staff of 350 next year.

The nuclear facility is a different story.

Last week, the Department of Energy began a review of the 2003 environmental impact statement for the nuclear facility portion of the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement project.

Under pressure from watchdog groups and a lawsuit by the Los Alamos Study Group to halt the project because of a seven-year-old environmental study that might no longer be valid, the government decided to continue working but to prepare a supplemental analysis on the project and possible impacts.

Roger Snyder, deputy manager of the Los Alamos Site Office, which oversees the LANL contract for the National Nuclear Security Administration, said the question was, "Are we covered by the 2003 environmental impact statement?"

"We are partially covered," he said, "but in light of the public interest we elected to go ahead and do the supplement."

Much has already been invested in the current plan, including an exploratory excavation of the nuclear facility foundation for seismic studies.

Construction had been scheduled to begin on the infrastructure package by mid-2011, but Snyder said, "There will be no construction associated with the nuclear facility during that period."

Holmes said the design contracts were in place with Sargent & Lundy, a power plant construction company based in Chicago. Merrick

& Co., with headquarters in Aurora, Colo., has the design contract for the gloveboxes and equipment.

The scoping meetings for the environmental analysis will begin with at least two meetings later this month, and is expected to take at least nine months to July 31. A decision paper could be issued 30 days after that.

Joni Arends, executive director of Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety, requested a time extension and additional venues in Taos, Albuquerque and Santa Fe for the scoping sessions. She also gave a presentation detailing rising water-usage levels at LANL, which will be aggravated by the additional water demands of the 225,000 cubic yards of concrete called for in the plans for the nuclear facility at its current site.

Two different locations have been included in the scoping alternatives. One set of alternatives calls for either refurbishing or making do with the existing Chemical and Metallurgy Research Building, a 60-year-old structure located in the main administrative area of the laboratory.

The other alternative would continue the current project while taking into account the increased safety and environmental impacts from the expanded construction program.

Snyder said that the long design phase built into the plan meant that only about 15 percent of the design work would be completed in a nine-month span.

Other alternatives may arise from the scoping process, which will be followed by a draft statement and another round of public comment, Snyder said.

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