



LOS ALAMOS STUDY GROUP



Los Alamos Lawsuit Appeal Filed, ABQ Journal

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Los Alamos Lawsuit Appeal Filed

By John Fleck / Journal Staff Writer on Fri, Jul 1, 2011

In the Annals of Opportune Timing, it does not get much better than this: activists at the Los Alamos Study Group filed an appeal this afternoon in federal court in a continued effort to block work on a proposed plutonium complex at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

A federal judge in Albuquerque in May dismissed the group's lawsuit seeking to halt work because of alleged inadequacies in environmental reviews of the proposed Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement project. Friday the group appealed that decision to the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals. From a statement issued this afternoon by Study Group head Greg Mello:

This project's name contains the word "replacement" but much more than that is involved. It is be the anchor facility in a new plutonium production complex. It is also entirely unnecessary, were maintaining existing warheads for many decades to come the goal. Instead the project is being justified on the basis of the assumption that large quantities of new kinds of warheads will be produced. The most dangerous processes in that new production are to be here at Los Alamos, where these unnatural hazards are to be added to the site's natural hazards of earthquake and fire.

I tracked down National Nuclear Security Administration spokesman Damien LaVera this afternoon in Los Alamos, where he was with a team touring the lab and the surrounding community threatened by the Las Conchas fire. His statement:

Because NNSA is committed to modernizing our plutonium processing capabilities in a way that supports our vital national security work and protects the environment, we look forward to reviewing this after the Las Conchas fire is under control.

[^ back to top](#)

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38 of 1000 DOCUMENTS

Farmington Daily Times (New Mexico)

July 18, 2011 Monday

Anti-nuke groups to fight Manhattan Project parks [1:20 p.m.]

SECTION: BREAKING; News

LENGTH: 141 words

ALBUQUERQUE (AP) Anti-nuclear activists say they will fight a proposal to create national parks at Los Alamos National Laboratory and two other sites where the world's first nuclear bombs were developed.

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar released a study to Congress last week that recommends establishing a national historical park to commemorate the top-secret Manhattan Project that developed the atomic bomb.

But Greg Mello, who heads the Los Alamos Study Group, said Monday that the recommendation debases the idea of national parks by glorifying weapons of mass destruction. National Park Service spokesman David Barna defends the proposal.

He says the idea is to preserve the history of the Manhattan Project, good or bad. If Congress approves, the parks would be created at Los Alamos, New Mexico; Hanford, Washington; and Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

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30 of 1000 DOCUMENTS

Monterey County Herald (California)

July 19, 2011 Tuesday

The Nation: Anti-nuke groups to fight Manhattan Project parks

BYLINE: The Monterey County Herald

SECTION: NATIONAL

LENGTH: 480 words

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.

Activists to fight planned parks

Anti-nuclear activists say they will fight a proposal to create national parks at Los Alamos National Laboratory and two other sites where the world's first nuclear bombs were developed.

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar released a study to Congress last week that recommends establishing a national historical park to commemorate the top-secret Manhattan Project that developed the atomic bomb.

But Greg Mello, who heads the Los Alamos Study Group, said Monday that the recommendation debases the idea of national parks by glorifying weapons of mass destruction.

WASHINGTON

NRC chief urges quick safety review

Nuclear Regulatory Commission Chairman Gregory Jaczko is urging his agency to decide within 90 days how to proceed with safety changes intended to improve the U.S. nuclear industry's response to catastrophic events such as the tsunami that crippled a nuclear plant in Japan.

A task force appointed by the NRC said last week that nuclear plant operators should be ordered to re-evaluate their earthquake and flood risk. The task force also recommended adding equipment to handle simultaneous damage to multiple reactors and ensuring electrical power and instruments are in place to monitor and cool spent fuel pools after a disaster.

BILLINGS, MONT.

Senator: EPA knew about asbestos

Federal regulators knew potentially contaminated bark and wood chips were being sold from a Superfund site in the asbestos-tainted town of Libby, Mont., for three years before they stopped the practice, according to a letter from the Environmental Protection Agency to U.S. Sen. Max Baucus.

Asbestos from a W.R. Grace mine in Libby has killed an estimated 400 people.

ATLANTA

Feds 'looking at' cheating in schools

U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan says he has been in contact with the department's investigative arm about test cheating scandals in schools, including a widespread one in Atlanta.

Duncan said Monday he believes the office is "looking at them" but stopped short of saying whether an investigation was

under way.

School officials in Washington, D.C., have said the federal department is investigating cheating allegations in the city's school district.

A state investigation released July 5 showed Atlanta educators in nearly half of the district's 100 schools changed exam sheets and gave students correct answers on standardized tests dating to 2001.

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.

Copper thief likely injured by jolt

Albuquerque police say at least one vandal was likely seriously injured trying to steal copper from an elementary school because the thieves left behind several melted tools and a scorched T-shirt.

They cut into a power line at East San Jose Elementary School over the weekend and triggered a 480-volt electrical shock.

Investigators say the thieves likely knew they were cutting into a live hot-wire but did it anyway.

Herald wire services

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31 of 1000 DOCUMENTS

Morning Star

July 19, 2011 Tuesday

World In Brief

SECTION: WORLD

LENGTH: 694 words

More die in Homs in security raids SYRIA: Security forces killed 10 people overnight in Homs province, opposition activist Mustafa Osso said today. Mr Osso said another four people were killed elsewhere in the region. Homs saw an outburst of sectarian violence over the weekend which reportedly resulted in more than 30 deaths, although some protesters have said that figure may be inflated. Assassins fail to kill president GUINEA: President Alpha Conde survived an assassination attempt this morning in which unidentified commandos assaulted his house.

In a radio address to the nation Mr Conde said his guards had "fought heroically" when the building came under attack at 3.10am. At least one member of his security detail was killed in the attack. Mr Conde became president last November in what the UN said was Guinea's first free and fair election, but has since been accused of only acting for the benefit of his own Malinke ethnicity. Speculation over future of Murdoch UNITED STATES: News Corp board member Thomas Perkins sparked speculation on Monday night when he said that the media empire's chief executive Rupert Murdoch "has the full support of the company's board of directors and we are not considering elevating chief operating officer Chase Carey to replace him." Mr Perkins repeated the media empire's mantra that "top management has been misled by very bad people at a very low level in the organisation." Anti-nuke activists against new parks UNITED STATES: Anti-nuclear campaigners have pledged to resist plans to create national parks at the Los Alamos national laboratory and two other sites where the world's first nuclear weapons were developed. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar has recommended the idea as a public commemoration of the Manhattan Project, which developed the atom bomb. Greg Mello of anti-nuclear watchdog the Los Alamos Study Group asked: "Are we really to make parks where we built instruments of mass murder, delivered to politicians the instruments of universal destruction and destroyed the marriage between science and human values?" Soldiers attack anti-Saleh march YEMEN: Security forces shot at marchers demanding the resignation of President Ali Abdullah Saleh on Monday, killing one person and injuring eight, doctors said today. Anti-government demonstrations over the weekend marked the 33rd anniversary of Mr Saleh's rule. He is still recovering in Saudi Arabia after being wounded by a rocket attack on his palace. Capitalists flee paper for gold ECONOMICS: Gold hit an all-time high of \$1,610 (£999) an ounce today as investors panic about the value of the euro and the dollar, traditionally seen as the world's safest currencies. "Gold has a long history of preserving wealth," Midas fund manager Tom Winmill said. "In 6,000 years it is one of the very few assets that have never gone to zero." HSBC analyst James Steel said: "Gold doesn't depend on a government's ability to repay. Neither does crude oil, which has the added use of powering cars, but it's easier to pick up a bar of gold than a swimming pool of oil." Bombers target opposition offices BULGARIA: Bombs exploded outside the offices of two opposition parties today, causing damage but no injuries. Sofia police chief Valeri Yordanov said the explosions were outside the offices of the Order, Law and Justice Party and the Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria. "The blasts did not seek to cause big damage but rather to intimidate," he said. Prime Minister Boiko Borisov dismissed accusations that the government was involved. Two top officials executed for graft CHINA: The Supreme People's Court has confirmed that the former vice-mayors of two of China's most prosperous cities were executed today. Xu Maiyong of Hangzhou and Jiang Renjie of Suzhou had been convicted of bribery, embezzlement and abuse of power. Xinhua news agency said Mr Xu had taken bribes worth over 145 million yuan (£14m), embezzled 54m yuan (£5m) from a state-owned firm and illegally diverted 71 million yuan (£6.8m) in property purchase payments. Mr Jiang had taken 108 million yuan (£10m) in bribes from property developers while he was in charge of urban planning.

LOAD-DATE: July 20, 2011

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

32 of 1000 DOCUMENTS

USA TODAY

July 19, 2011 Tuesday
CHASE EDITION

Budget cuts hobble San Francisco court

BYLINE: John Bacon with staff and wire reports

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. 3A

LENGTH: 556 words

San Francisco Superior Court Presiding Judge Katherine Feinstein said about 200 of the court's 480 workers will be let go by Sept. 30 to close a \$13.75million budget deficit caused by state budget cuts.

And she said it could get worse if optimistic revenue projections don't materialize by January. As a result, Feinstein said it will take many more hours to pay a traffic ticket in person, up to 18 months to finalize a divorce and five years for a lawsuit to go to trial. "The civil justice system in San Francisco is collapsing," Feinstein said.

Minnesota man admits aiding terrorists

A Minnesota man pleaded guilty to a terrorism charge for helping Somali men travel from Minneapolis to their homeland to take up arms with a militant group, averting the first trial in a long-running federal investigation into the recruiting of U.S. fighters for al-Shabab.

Omer Abdi Mohamed, 26, of St. Anthony pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to provide material support to terrorists, admitting he helped provide people as part of a conspiracy to murder, kidnap and maim others in a foreign country. He faces a maximum 15 years in prison when he is sentenced.

Mohamed didn't travel to Somalia, but admitted he attended secret meetings and helped the men who traveled there.

Nuclear sites may get national parks

Anti-nuclear activists were lining up against legislation to create national parks at Los Alamos National Laboratory and two other sites where the first nuclear bombs were developed.

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar has recommended establishing a national historical park to commemorate the top-secret Manhattan Project that developed the atomic bomb.

Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., wants to create sites at Los Alamos; Hanford, Wash.; and Oak Ridge, Tenn.

Greg Mello of the anti-nuclear watchdog Los Alamos Study Group asked, "Are we really poised to make a national park out of a few shabby ruins where we built instruments of mass murder?"

Teen accused of bludgeoning parents

A Florida teen is accused of bludgeoning his parents with a hammer and then hosting dozens of friends for a party while their bodies lay in the bedroom, police said.

Tyler Hadley, 17, is charged with two counts of first-degree murder. He is being held without bond at a juvenile detention

center.

His parents, Blake and Mary-Jo Hadley, were likely struck with the hammer in their heads and torsos after their son posted on Facebook alerting friends to a party Saturday evening.

As many as 60 people attended the party that event at the house, according to Port St. Lucie Police spokesman Tom Nichols.

Vermont wins round in nuke plant fight

A federal judge said he won't order Vermont's only nuclear plant to remain open while a lawsuit to determine its long-term future plays out.

The state is moving to close the Vermont Yankee plant when its initial 40-year license expires in March. The plant's owner, New Orleans-based Entergy Corp., got a 20-year license extension for Vermont Yankee from the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission and filed a lawsuit arguing that the federal action pre-empts the state's effort to close the plant.

Also

MEDFORD, Ore. -- A 51-year-old man stabbed his wife and their four young children and set fire to their house, killing all five victims, Police Chief Tim George said. The father was taken to the hospital and was being detained.

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33 of 1000 DOCUMENTS

The Virginian-Pilot(Norfolk, VA.)

July 19, 2011 Tuesday
The Virginian-Pilot Edition

Anti-nuclear groups oppose U.S. park for Manhattan Project

SECTION: FRONT; Pg. A3

LENGTH: 401 words

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. | Anti-nuclear activists are lining up against legislation to create national parks at Los Alamos National Laboratory and two other sites where the world's first nuclear bombs were developed, calling the plan an expensive glorification of an ugly chapter in history.

"It is a debasement of the national parks idea," said Greg Mello, a co-founder of the anti-nuclear Los Alamos Study Group.

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar released a study to Congress last week that recommends establishing a national historical park to commemorate the top-secret Manhattan Project that developed the atomic bomb. Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., said he is drafting legislation to create sites at Los Alamos; Hanford, Wash.; and Oak Ridge, Tenn

. District of Columbia

House bill would block some U.S. aid

WASHINGTON | A House panel unveiled a bill Monday that would block U.S. aid to Pakistan, Egypt, Lebanon and the Palestinian Authority unless the Obama administration reassures Congress that they are cooperating in the worldwide fight against terrorism.

The legislation is a direct challenge to President Barack Obama and his foreign policy authority and comes as the House is looking at significant cuts in the annual budget for the State Department and foreign assistance.

The House Foreign Affairs Committee will consider the bill authorizing the money on Wednesday. Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Fla., chairwoman of the panel, released an initial draft Monday

.

District of Columbia

FDA approves new flu vaccine

WASHINGTON | The Food and Drug Administration said Monday it has approved the new flu vaccine for the season beginning this year.

Each year the FDA works with other federal agencies and global health experts to design a vaccine to protect against the three viral strains most likely to cause the flu. This year's flu shot will be a duplicate of last year's because the same flu strains are still circulating.

nuclear plant

judge denies bid to keep site open

MONTPELIER, Vt. | A federal judge Monday said he would not order Vermont's only nuclear plant to remain open while a lawsuit to determine its long-term future plays out. Vermont is moving to shut down Vermont Yankee when its initial 40-year license expires in March.

The plant's owner, Entergy Corp., got a 20-year license extension from the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission. It argues in a lawsuit that the federal action pre-empts the state's.

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34 of 1000 DOCUMENTS

Waterloo Region Record

July 19, 2011 Tuesday
Final Edition

IN BRIEF

BYLINE: Record news services

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. A4

LENGTH: 645 words

Kabul, Afghanistan

Gen. Petraeus hands over challenging Afghan command

Gen. David H. Petraeus handed over command of the Afghan war on Monday, leaving behind a country wracked by deep political instability whose fledgling security forces are fighting a weakened but deadly insurgency that kills coalition troops and Afghan civilians and officials nearly every day. His successor, Gen. John R. Allen, will confront those challenges - and many more - as he guides NATO-led forces through the hand-off of security control to Afghan forces by the end of 2014 - a process that is still in its earliest stages. His first day in command offered a grim snapshot of those difficulties. Three NATO soldiers were killed on Monday by an improvised bomb in eastern Afghanistan, and another died in a separate incident in the south, NATO forces said in statements.

Cairo

Egypt's rulers appoint judge

to form electoral commission

Egypt's military rulers commissioned a top judge Monday to form an electoral commission, starting the process of organizing the country's first elections after the popular uprising that ousted authoritarian leader Hosni Mubarak. The military decree effectively sets a time frame for the first parliamentary elections in Egypt's transition to democracy. The commission begins work on Sept. 18, with the vote expected to follow roughly two months later, according to human rights lawyers.

Bucharest, Romania

Stolen rocket warheads found stashed near railway station

Dozens of small, old rocket warheads stolen from a train carrying military equipment were found Monday stashed near a railway station in a village of Romania, authorities said. When the theft was discovered over the weekend, authorities promised the 64 warheads posed no danger to the public because the warheads, or fuses, were being transported separately from the rockets. The warheads were found intact in four boxes near the railway station in the village of Chitila, just north of Bucharest.

Albuquerque, N.M.

Activists oppose move to create national parks at nuclear sites

Anti-nuclear activists are lining up against legislation to create national parks at Los Alamos National Laboratory and two

other sites where the world's first nuclear bombs were developed, calling the plan an expensive glorification of an ugly chapter in history. "It is a debasement of the national parks idea," said Greg Mello, a co-founder of the anti-nuclear watchdog, Los Alamos Study Group. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar released a study to Congress last week that recommends establishing a national historical park to commemorate the top-secret Manhattan Project that developed the atomic bomb.

Washington

Republicans push ahead

with doomed spending cut plan

Republicans holding up an increase in the American debt limit - a move that could produce the first ever U.S. debt default - were pushing ahead Monday with a spending cut plan that has virtually no chance of becoming law. President Barack Obama promised to veto such a bill should it reach his desk. House Republicans were preparing Tuesday to put to a vote their plan that axes spending, rules out any tax increases, and calls for a balanced-budget amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would require the government to not spend more than it takes in.

Pasadena, Calif.

NASA spacecraft gets set

to study massive asteroid

NASA says its Dawn spacecraft is preparing to study the massive asteroid Vesta after being captured into its orbit during the weekend. The space agency's Jet Propulsion Laboratory said Monday the capture was estimated to have occurred Friday when Dawn was 15,930 kilometres from Vesta and 188 million kilometres from Earth in the main asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter. Mission principal investigator Christopher Russell says it's the beginning of a study of what is arguably the oldest existing primordial surface in the solar system.

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27 of 1000 DOCUMENTS

Chattanooga Times Free Press (Tennessee)

July 19, 2011 Tuesday

SECTION: WIRE - POLITICS; Pg. A7

LENGTH: 351 words

RNC raises \$19 million

WASHINGTON -- The Republican National Committee raised \$19 million in the past three months but is still \$17.5 million in debt.

The committee said Monday that it had raised \$36.6 million this year, including \$19 million in the second quarter, and had \$7.3 million in the bank. RNC Chairman Reince Priebus started his term in January with almost \$25 million in red ink and has paid down \$6.7 million.

The Democratic National Committee raised \$38 million in the same April-to-June fundraising period. The DNC has \$21.4 million in the bank.

Anti-nuke groups to fight parks

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. -- Anti-nuclear activists say they will fight a proposal to create national parks at Los Alamos National Laboratory and two other sites where the world's first nuclear bombs were developed.

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar released a study to Congress last week that recommends establishing a national historical park to commemorate the top-secret Manhattan Project that developed the atomic bomb.

But Greg Mello, who heads the Los Alamos Study Group, said Monday that the recommendation debases the idea of national parks by glorifying weapons of mass destruction.

If Congress approves, the parks would be created at Los Alamos, N.M.; Hanford, Wash.; and Oak Ridge, Tenn.

Clinton in India for security talks

NEW DELHI -- U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton is in India for security and counterterrorism talks as the two countries try to broaden their relationship.

Clinton begins her formal program today in New Delhi with meetings expected to focus primarily on U.S. plans in Afghanistan, India's strained ties with arch-rival neighbor Pakistan and economic and trade issues. On Wednesday, Clinton will visit the southern port of Chennai, the first secretary of state to do so.

The Associated Press

, to press India to boost its engagement throughout the Asia-Pacific.

Clinton is on the third leg of a 12-day, around-the-world diplomatic tour that has already taken her to Turkey and Greece.

From India, she will visit Indonesia, Hong Kong and southern mainland China before returning home on July 25.

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LOS ALAMOS STUDY GROUP

Nuclear Facility Plans Continue, Albuquerque Journal North, Aug 27, 2011



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Nuclear Facility Plans Continue

By John Fleck / Journal Staff Writer on Sat, Aug 27, 2011

The National Nuclear Security Administration wants to push ahead with its plans to build a multibillion dollar plutonium laboratory in Los Alamos, despite concerns about rising costs and seismic safety, according to a document released late Friday afternoon.

An environmental analysis, made public in final form Friday, calls for construction of the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement-Nuclear Facility, but continues to leave open key construction details as engineers try to figure out how to cope with seismic risk at the site.

In a statement, NNSA official Kevin Smith said the agency "carefully considered suggestions, alternatives and comments offered by stakeholders."

Critics questioned the agency's claim to have considered alternatives to the project, currently estimated to cost between \$3.7 billion and \$5.8 billion.

"NNSA offered no real alternatives to building the Nuclear Facility," said Jay Coghlan of Nuclear Watch New Mexico.

Greg Mello of the watchdog Los Alamos Study Group criticized release of the new document late on a Friday afternoon.

"The release of this document during the Friday afternoon 'news hole' is a telling reminder of the insincerity of NNSA's 'public involvement' processes," Mello said. "We are eager to review its content, but the fact remains that it comes long after full federal commitment to the project and hundreds of millions of dollars in prior appropriations for this one specific project only."

He called the environmental analysis "a sham."

In hearings over the summer, project critics sharply questioned federal officials about whether they had adequately considered alternatives to the project, suggesting they may have been laying groundwork for a lawsuit on the question.

The building would take the place of a 60-year-old lab area known as CMR, the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research building, where scientists analyze samples of dangerously radioactive plutonium, work that is central to the lab's nuclear weapons work.

Independent nuclear safety analysts have long called the old building a danger, but lab and federal officials have been unsuccessful over a two-decade period in settling on a plan to replace it.

The final study briefly considered and then ruled out the possibility of building the laboratory at another U.S. site with less seismic risk than Los Alamos, which sits atop mesas laced with faults. It also fell back on a 2004 study to conclude that upgrading the existing laboratory would not be feasible.

Lab critics have suggested both options should get a more serious look because of the dramatically increasing

costs of the project. As recently as 2007, federal officials told congressional auditors they were confident the building could be completed for \$800 million, and be finished by 2014. The more than fourfold increase in price since is accompanied by a completion date of 2023.

The final environmental analysis comes as members of Congress are raising questions about the project's growing costs. In a June report, a House subcommittee pointed out that the new laboratory is larger than the building it is meant to replace. The subcommittee, in laying out a spending plan for the NNSA next year, called for "the adoption of cost-reduction strategies to make construction more affordable and to curb continued cost escalation."

[^ back to top](#)

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LOS ALAMOS STUDY GROUP

CMRR would be starting point of new arms race, Santa Fe New Mexican, Willem Malten, Aug 27, 2011



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SANTA FE  NEW MEXICAN.com

CMRR WOULD BE STARTING POINT OF NEW ARMS RACE

By WILLEM MALTEN

8/27/2011

If it ever gets built, the proposed CMRR-Nuclear Facility in Los Alamos would consume \$6 billion or more of increasingly scarce tax money. Construction would clog the roads with trucks hauling 400,000 tons [up to 545,000 cu. yds] of volcanic ash to be stored somewhere. Three newly constructed concrete batch plants along Pajarito Road would produce some 350,000 tons [up to 400,000 cu. yds.] of concrete to fill a 125-foot deep fresh hole in the earth. The CMRR-Nuclear Facility would essentially be a 406,000-square-foot bunker, mainly hidden under the ground for fear of incoming enemy rockets.

Despite the enormous size of the building, the utilized space would be less than 10 percent: the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Project would be hosting a 22,500-square-foot, most secretive laboratory — the "Evil Grail" of nuclear weapons work. It will be built on what is known to be a 7 magnitude earthquake fault line, and it is slated to vault 6 metric tons of plutonium, as much as is needed to replace the nation's entire nuclear weapons stockpile, an accident a la Fukushima waiting to happen right here.

I believe this is a terrible waste of public resources, especially at a time when many people are scraping by from meager paycheck to meager paycheck. Contrary to what our U.S. Sens. Tom Udall and Jeff Bingaman have been implying, the construction phase of this project is not even an employment stimulus to speak off. With all that money, an average of only 400 construction jobs would be created over the construction period, of which a minority would come from New Mexico. Including planning and engineering, this project would create only one temporary job for every \$10 million of investment.

Once the facility is done, in 2023 or so, even these few jobs would come to an end, and this behemoth would be populated by Los Alamos technicians and scientists now working in other facilities. Despite continued tiresome and misleading denials from Los Alamos National Laboratory, the CMRR-Nuclear Facility is the centerpiece of a nuclear "pit" factory meant to replace the Rocky Flats Plant.

With CMRR-NF, there would be less science, and more bombs, in LANL's work. It's not for the bombs we have; not one U.S. warhead requires CMRR-NF, now, or ever. By the time CMRR-NF is finished, the whole stockpile would already have been upgraded by other means. This facility is for building new warheads in quantity, not maintaining old ones. In many ways the CMRR-NF is the "START" of the new arms race we don't want to have.

The Los Alamos Study Group (LASG.org) is working to halt this tragic and misguided waste in the courts and in Washington, where we have conducted hundreds of briefings over the past few years. This summer, the House of Representatives proposed to slash \$100 million from next year's funding for the project, and has urged the Senate to join its call to postpone construction pending further analysis of the whole project, from mission and utility to the specific design chosen.

Especially now that the financial realities of the U.S. are becoming clear to the general public and Congress alike, there is a growing groundswell of resistance against this superfluous project. Local communities, including Santa Fe, have formally adopted resolutions calling for re-examination of this project. CMRR-NF is becoming a "joke" on the streets — a bad joke being perpetrated on New Mexicans.

Willem Malten is a longtime Santa Fe resident, owner of the Cloud Cliff bakery, and a director of the Los Alamos



LOS ALAMOS STUDY GROUP



NNSA issues final SEIS for nuclear facility part of CMRR project, Los Alamos Monitor, Aug 27, 2011



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Los Alamos Monitor

NNSA Issues Final SEIS for Nuclear Facility Part of CMRR project

By John Severance

Saturday, August 27, 2011 at 4:22 am ((Updated: August 27, 12:38 pm))

The National Nuclear Security Administration announced Friday it was moving forward with its plans for the nuclear facility portion of the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Project (CMRR) at the Los Alamos National Laboratory.

An artist's rendering of the CMRR facility. Click on the image to enlarge. <<http://www.lamonitor.com/sites/www.lamonitor.com/files/imagecache/slide-600/CMRR.jpg>>

The NNSA posted the Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) on the DOE NEPA website.

The timing of the release of the impact statement – late Friday afternoon – did not go unnoticed by critics.

"It is unlikely that the agency will receive any significant negative publicity for such stunts, as most news reporters who cover NNSA expect such behavior," said Greg Mello, the director of the Los Alamos Study Group.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will issue a formal Notice of Availability for the SEIS via the Federal Register, as required by National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations, in early September.

"DOE carefully considered suggestions, alternatives and comments offered by stakeholders through NEPA's public input process," said Kevin Smith, manager of NNSA'S Los Alamos Site Office. "I am confident this document contains the information and analyses needed to choose the right path forward for providing the responsive infrastructure necessary to support our nation's nuclear security."

The NNSA held a series of meetings throughout the state to gather public comments concerning the SEIS. And most of those comments were negative.

Joni Arends of Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety and Robert H. Gilkeson issued a 43-page report in June, documenting their concerns about the project. Their basis was that there was insufficient, incorrect and misrepresented seismic information for design basis related to earthquakes and it asked DOE to retract the draft SEIS for the project.

"The data in the reports by DOE and LANL show that the maximum power of the faults is M8, a great earthquake," Gilkeson said Saturday morning. "The hazard at the proposed CMRR Nuclear Facility is based on a maximum energy of a 7.27 earthquake, which is more than 20 times below an M8."

The final SEIS calls for the NNSA to use the preferred alternative action to build the CMRR Nuclear Facility in the lab's Technical Area 55 and use an approach called the Modified CMRR-NF design concept.

The press release says this is not the first time NNSA has thoroughly investigated the environmental effects of the proposed CMRR Project. It claims that LANL has conducted a new site-wide seismic analysis of the geophysical structures that underlie the lab area and NNSA has incorporated that information into the design concept.

NNSA still has some decisions to make construction-wise.

There are two construction options for the Modified CMRR-NF concept. One is the Deep Excavation Option, in which a geologic layer of material would be removed and replaced with low-slump concrete. The second is a Shallow Excavation Option in which the facility is constructed in a higher geologic layer. NNSA will determine whether to implement the Modified CMRR-NF, and whether to use the Shallow or Deep option for construction of the planned facility. The selected option will undergo engineering analysis and independent review. A Record of Decision regarding NNSA's decisions on the CMRR-NF is expected in October.

"We are eager to review its content, but the fact remains that it comes long after full federal commitment to the project and hundreds of millions of dollars in prior appropriations for this one specific project only," said Mello, whose Los Alamos Study Group currently is in litigation with DOE and the NNSA. "The SEIS is a sham. Because of the unprecedented scale of this project we need to look beyond the specifics of this particular project to the broader implications for our government, democracy, and social contract."

The projected cost of the project has ranged from \$3.7 billion to \$5.8 billion.

Jay Coghlan, Director of Nuclear Watch New Mexico, added, "The NNSA and Los Alamos Lab seems to pay little heed to wasting taxpayers' money in these hard economic times. ... It would be far better if taxpayers' monies were invested in getting Americans back to work, since the \$6 billion Nuclear Facility will also produce no new permanent jobs. Instead, it will just further entrench Los Alamos into the diminishing nuclear weapons business, when now is exactly the time that the lab should be diversifying its mission for job growth."

The proposed CMRR project also faces another hurdle – possible budget cuts.

In June, the House Appropriations Committee voted to cut \$100 million in FY 12 funding for the project. The committee recommended allocating \$200 million for the project, 33 percent below the budget request. The Energy and Water appropriation bill was passed by the House and was sent to the Senate for consideration.

"It's up the Senate and the super committee," Mello said.

The super committee was formed last month when the federal government avoided a shutdown. Part of the debt ceiling bill was that both chambers of Congress would appoint three members from each political party and they would be charged with coming up with \$1.2 trillion in spending cuts this year. Should the super committee fail, then automatic spending cuts would go into effect that would drastically reduce defense spending.

The CMRR would replace the 60-year-old Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Building and consolidate existing capabilities at LANL.

The full SEIS summary can be found attached with this story. The full two-volume SEIS report can be accessed by clicking here <http://energy.gov/nepa/downloads/eis-0350-s1-final-supplemental-environmental-impact-statement>.

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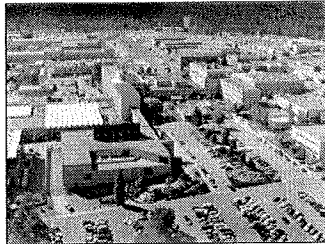
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Pit Stop

US House budget would curtail LANL funding

Wren Abbott



Los Alamos National Laboratory, at which the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Facility and Transuranic Waste Facility are to be housed, sits on a major geological fault.

Two controversial Los Alamos National Laboratory construction projects will take big hits if a budget bill passed by the US House of Representatives is signed into law next month.

The House Committee on Appropriations' energy and water development budget bill, passed last month, slashes \$100 million from the 2012 budget request for the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Facility, a plutonium processing plant planned at LANL. The committee also recommended no funding for construction of the Transuranic Waste Facility, a companion building to the CMRR that would house radioactive by-products of plutonium pit production.

Those two projects are the only National Nuclear Security Administration sites nationwide that the House voted not to fully fund. NNSA is a branch of the US Department of Energy that handles military applications of nuclear technology.

The committee's concerns dovetail with those voiced by local antinuclear proliferation activists who have long railed against the CMRR. Chief among those sticking points are the facility's projected \$6 billion price tag and safety issues associated with housing more than 13,000 pounds of plutonium. The report the committee released along with the bill also lends credence to growing concerns about the CMRR's proposed siting on a major geologic fault line.

A LANL spokesman referred SFR to NNSA for comment; an NNSA spokesman didn't return a call before press time.

The remaining \$200 million that the bill would appropriate for the CMRR would fund design and engineering, but not construction because LANL "must first resolve major seismic issues" with the design and reassess which functions are necessary at the proposed facility.

A 2007 seismic analysis of the proposed site found a much higher level of risk than was estimated in the 1990s. The new analysis found that the Pajarito fault line, a geologic formation where seismic activity is concentrated, intersects with other smaller faults that would magnify the motion if Pajarito ruptured.

At a June CMRR public forum in Santa Fe, geologist Robert Gilkeson stated that LANL's environmental impact statement didn't take into account the full seismic risk, and said the proposed site could be hit by an earthquake with a magnitude over 7.5.

Greg Mello, director of the Los Alamos Study Group, says the Department of Energy had an "extremely optimistic" notion of Los Alamos' seismic potential when it decided to locate plutonium processing facilities here.

"Then they put all the data together that they've amassed and realized Los Alamos was capable of some pretty damn big earthquakes," Mello says.

LANL's 2008 evaluation of the facility notes that changes in design criteria as a result of the new seismic data "have the potential for major project impact," and said costs would "increase significantly" as the design was upgraded accordingly.

The budget bill associates "continued cost escalation" with NNSA construction projects in general and notes the need to monitor such projects "to ensure that prudent project management practices are followed and...to ensure that taxpayer funds are not wasted."

The fact that the CMRR's expected cost has jumped from \$600 million to \$6 billion seems to support the committee's concerns. Bechtel Corp., one of the contractors operating LANL, also operates the Hanford Nuclear Reservation in Washington state, which cost almost double its \$5.8 billion projected construction price.

The committee's directive to re-evaluate the CMRR's proposed functions also substantiates concerns about the facility's purpose. By LANL's own estimate, the CMRR won't be in operation until 2023, by which time the Department of Energy may already have finished upgrading existing warheads, nuclear technology expert David Overskei said at a nuclear defense summit earlier this year. The budget bill's accompanying report actually states that fully funding NNSA's proposed construction

projects would compromise efforts to upgrade the warheads, not support them.

“Every nuclear weapon in the US stockpile will have been refurbished by [2023] without this building... One of the questions some insiders ask is, ‘Isn’t this building a little too late?’” Mello says.

The bill also reduces environmental cleanup funding at LANL, even as it allots extra cleanup funding at other sites. The committee’s report states that the budget aims to preserve cleanup funding at all of the sites “at the highest possible levels,” with less than a 1 percent funding reduction from fiscal year 2011. Yet LANL was allotted \$174 million less for cleanup than NNSA requested—a 20 percent reduction from FY 2011 levels. The report cites the DOE’s failure to “develop a comprehensive plan for cleanup of legacy waste” at LANL, states that the cost of remediation is “uncertain,” and directs DOE to submit a more detailed cleanup plan before receiving more remediation funding.

“They can’t make decisions about cleanup because we don’t have the basic groundwater monitoring networks around these [legacy waste] dumps,” Joni Arends, executive director of Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety, says.

Although Jay Coghlan, executive director at Nuclear Watch New Mexico, calls the bill’s partial defunding of LANL activities “definitely significant,” he is only cautiously optimistic. The Senate hasn’t voted on a similar bill since FY 2009; if the bill doesn’t pass after the Senate reconvenes Sept. 5, Congress will use a continuing resolution that typically keeps funding at prior years’ levels until a formal appropriations bill becomes law.

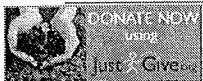
“It’s always unpredictable to say where Congress is going to come out; there’s a good chance the House cuts could stand given all the fiscal pressures,” Coghlan says. But he warns that the “super committee” created to try to find \$1.2 trillion in budget cuts to reduce the US deficit adds another complication. “One of the 12 congressmen on the ‘super committee’ is Sen. Jon Kyl [R-Ariz.], and he’s been the main architect of so-called modernization of the nuclear weapons complex.”

Mello warns that, if the budget cuts don’t stand, construction on the CMRR could start as early as October 1.

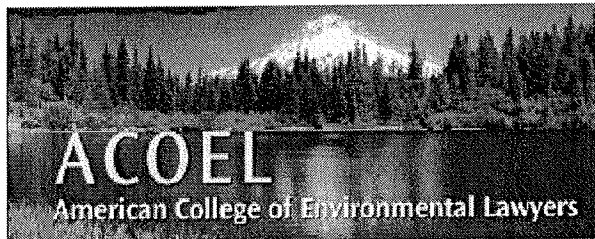
“If they get that \$100 million for early construction...they’ll want to start pouring cement as soon as possible because then it becomes more and more difficult to stop these projects,” Arends says.



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The National Environmental Policy Act: New Mexico District Court Dismisses Challenge to Nuclear Pit Facility Based on Doctrine of “Prudential Mootness”

Posted on September 12, 2011 by Thomas Hnasko

A federal district judge in New Mexico has dismissed the Los Alamos Study Group's (the “Study Group's”) complaint challenging the United States Department of Energy (“DOE”) and the National Nuclear Security Administration's (“NNSA”) efforts to construct the new Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility (“CMRR-NF”) at Los Alamos, New Mexico.

Despite evidence presented by the Study Group that the project had changed so dramatically since the original NEPA analyses, and that defendants had acknowledged in their draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (“SEIS”) that the originally-approved CMRR-NF project could no longer be built, the federal court nonetheless held that the doctrine of “prudential mootness” supported dismissal of the NEPA challenge because defendants had allegedly changed their policies during the lawsuit and were now conducting a SEIS to rectify any NEPA deficiencies with the project.

The Study Group pointed out at the hearing on defendants' Motion to Dismiss and the Study Group's Motion for Preliminary Injunction that the eight-year old EIS did not consider, mention, or remotely authorize the existing project. The evidence presented by the Study Group also demonstrated that defendants had issued final design contracts for their preferred alternative, that those contracts required the final detailed designs for the project to be “construction-ready,” and that defendants were considering no other alternatives to the massive venture. Moreover, even the draft SEIS produced by the defendants at the hearing acknowledged that the original project, selected from an EIS prepared in 2003, could no longer be built because of seismic conditions and other geologic constraints, and would be discarded as a “no-action” alternative.

The project as originally conceived called for a pit facility to be built no deeper than 50-75 feet below grade. Based on the criteria examined in 2003, the 2004 ROD stated that: “The environmental impacts of the preferred alternative” will be “minimal” and “small.” Since the 2004 ROD, however, the project has undergone substantial changes. The original budget for the Nuclear Facility was estimated at \$350-\$550 million. The CMRR-NF, as now proposed, has changed from a structure to be built to a depth of 50 feet, to a structure requiring an excavation to 125 feet, with the bottom 50-60 feet of the hole filled with concrete. The concrete now needed is 375,000 cubic yards, up from 3,194 cubic yards as originally estimated. This is more concrete than was used for the Big-I Interchange in Albuquerque, or for the Elephant Butte Dam in southern New Mexico. The steel needed is now 18,539 tons, up from 242 tons. That is roughly the equivalent of the Eifel Tower. In short, the present iteration of the Nuclear Facility dwarfs the Manhattan Project and will be the largest construction project in the history of the state of New Mexico.

Despite these fundamental changes, the Department of Justice successfully persuaded the District Court that it remained open to alternatives and was not irrevocably committed to the present iteration of the Nuclear Facility. According to DOJ attorneys, alternatives were being considered because DOE had not yet decided just how deep the hole should be, i.e., whether it should be 125 feet as reported, or whether it could be reduced to around 80 feet. The Study Group's counsel countered that this was not an examination of alternatives, but rather design modifications to a single, pre-determined alternative reached without NEPA support.

The district court accepted the DOJ's arguments and reasoned that defendants could continue with their present project so long as additional NEPA compliance was achieved after the fact and no physical construction on the project had yet occurred. The Study Group has appealed to the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals, where the primary issue will be whether a federal agency may implement a major federal action and avoid an injunction under NEPA by claiming that additional NEPA analyses, through the vehicle of a SEIS, somehow render the already-chosen project compliant with NEPA's directive that detailed design or construction activities should not take place until an EIS examines viable alternatives and a ROD authorizes the federal action.

Any questions or comments should be directed to Thomas M. Hnasko.

[^ back to top](#)

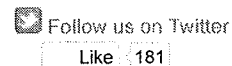
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Trying to prop up nuke lab budgets

By John Fleck / Journal Staff Writer on Tue, Sep 13, 2011

Not everyone in New Mexico is supportive of Rep. Martin Heinrich's effort to protect budget cuts at the state's nuclear weapons labs, which I wrote about this morning. Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group sent around a note to his mailing list over the weekend blasting the move:

The letter is quoted as saying the special exception is needed to keep "on track the tight schedule for infrastructure modernization and life extensions of our current warhead types."

The "infrastructure modernization" in question is primarily the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility (CMRR-NF) and related projects at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) and the Uranium Processing Facility (UPF) at the Y-12 facility in Tennessee, which two facilities are expected to cost about \$12 billion, according to both appropriations committees. (Privately, some government analysts are using much higher numbers.)

In so doing, Heinrich is again leading the House Democrats in turning the Energy and Water Appropriations bill against renewable energy, home weatherization, levee repair, environmental cleanup at LANL and elsewhere, and all its other non-military purposes. Given the extremely high inefficiency of the nuclear weapons program as a job creator, much less efficient even than broad tax cuts (a low bar against which to compare), Heinrich is not just working against green jobs, but against jobs altogether.

For those interested, here's the Heinrich-Turner letter to the administration:

9-12-11 Turner-Heinrich Letter to POTUS

[^back to top](#)

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24 of 1000 DOCUMENTS

Albuquerque Journal (New Mexico)

Distributed by McClatchy-Tribune Business News

October 14, 2011 Friday

Officials Confirm LANL Plutonium Lab Plan

BYLINE: John Fleck, Albuquerque Journal, N.M.

SECTION: STATE AND REGIONAL NEWS

LENGTH: 354 words

Oct. 14--Federal officials Thursday confirmed their plan to build a multibillion-dollar plutonium laboratory in Los Alamos to support the lab's nuclear weapons work, issuing a legally required notice to proceed with the project.

The 16-page notice from the National Nuclear Security Administration says the new building is needed to replace a 60-year-old building near the end of its useful life that runs across a major fault line that renders it unsafe.

The new building, according to the official notice, "would provide vitally essential technical support capabilities to NNSA's national security mission."

The notice, based on a new environmental analysis of the project, is intended to meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act. But there were already signs Thursday that federal officials may not have done enough to satisfy their critics.

One group, the Albuquerque-based Los Alamos Study Group, is already in court challenging the project, and other project opponents are considering legal action.

"We certainly would consider litigation," said Don Hancock of the Southwest Research and Information Center in Albuquerque. Hancock and other project critics have argued that federal officials did not properly consider alternatives to building the lab, especially in light of escalating costs as engineers redesign the building to accommodate earthquake safety concerns.

"I definitely think they are legally vulnerable," Hancock said.

The project has come under increasing scrutiny in the past year because of cost increases. In a report to Congress in November, the National Nuclear Security Administration estimated the building will cost between \$3.7 billion and \$5.8 billion -- four to seven times as much as officials thought just three years earlier.

While Congress has failed to complete action on its fiscal year 2011-12 budget, both House and Senate spending committees raised questions this year about the project's rising costs.

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Paving Over the Money Pit of Nuclear-Weapons Spending

By Russ Wellen, October 19, 2011

To conform to the requirements of the congressional supercommittee, the House of Representatives is debating whether to cut hundreds of billions from nuclear weapons programs over the next 10 years.

At the Atlantic, Joseph Cirincione of the Ploughshares Funds writes::

Rep. Ed Markey (D-Mass.) sent a letter to the 12 members of the supercommittee ... signed by 65 lawmakers." Even though the Cold War ended, Markey wrote, "We continue to spend over \$50 billion a year on the U.S. nuclear arsenal. ... We are robbing the future to pay for the unneeded weapons of the past."

The House Appropriations Committee cut funding for nuclear warheads and weapons material production by almost 7 percent from the President's request, or \$498 million. [Meanwhile, the] Senate subcommittee cut just a tad less -- \$440 million -- from the same programs. Members are increasingly troubled by rising costs, slipping schedules and questionable need for new weapons production plants. "The Committee is concerned about the escalating costs for two new nuclear facilities to handle plutonium and uranium," the Senate report noted.

One of these two new nuclear facilities is the proposed Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility (CMRR-NF) at Los Alamos National Laboratory. On the grounds that a new Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), instead of just a supplemental EIS, was required because of, among other things, seismic issues (such as a 3.8 earthquake nearby on October 16) the Los Alamos Study Group sought to halt the project.

In his latest press release, LASG executive director Greg Mello writes that, on October 13, "the National Nuclear Security Administration ... issued an 'amended' 'Record of Decision' to build the [CMRR-NF] expected to cost \$4 to \$6 billion. ... as much as the total constant-dollar [adjusted for inflation] cost of all the buildings and programs in Los Alamos for the first decade and a half, from 1943 to 1957." During the Manhattan Project, that is.

The Record of Decision, Mello explains, "is the formal completion of the most recent environmental review of the project under the National Environmental Policy Act."

But, just as it looked like it was green-lighted, "We do not anticipate that this project will succeed, in the end," writes Mello. "We are now in a kind of fiscal 'Indian Summer;' the real frosts of deficit reduction have not started to hit. ...

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Many decision makers know there isn't enough money to build CMRR simultaneously with a more important project in Tennessee unless both are slowed and made much more expensive in the process." Ironic as that sounds.

He concludes that the United States can't "afford to maintain such a huge nuclear arsenal in the first place, since the delivery systems are wearing out and very expensive to replace." As usual, Mello not only looks at the costs, but the wider implications for the real-world economy. The CMRR-NF, like nuclear weapons in general for the most part, "also makes no economically useful infrastructure, attracts no private capital, trains nobody in anything useful for our economy, and produces no goods and services for sale (we hope). ... At \$1,000,000 per job created, it's an economic disaster in waiting."

Remember the movies and Broadway play *Little Shop of Horrors*? Our nuclear-weapons program is like Audrey II, the carnivorous plant screaming "Feed me." Time to, in the words of conservatives, starve the beast.

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The Associated Press State & Local Wire

October 21, 2011 Friday 11:24 PM GMT

Watchdog sues again over Los Alamos lab proposal

BYLINE: By JERI CLAUSING, Associated Press

SECTION: STATE AND REGIONAL

LENGTH: 393 words

DATELINE: ALBUQUERQUE N.M.

A nuclear watchdog group on Friday filed a second lawsuit seeking to halt construction of a \$5.8 billion plutonium research lab at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

The suit filed in U.S. District Court by the Los Alamos Study Group seeks to force Los Alamos to consider cheaper alternatives to the project.

The National Nuclear Security Administration, an arm of the U.S. Department of Energy that oversees the nuclear labs, last week issued the formal orders needed to begin taking bids for final design and construction of the nuclear facility, called the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement project, or CMRR.

The facility would replace a 60-year-old building that has been declared seismically unsafe. It's a project that has been on the drawing board for decades, and one that won't likely be finished for close to another decade.

Critics have been fighting the proposal for as long as it has been on the table, arguing it is an unnecessary and outrageously priced bomb factory.

Lab officials insist nuclear weapons will neither be made nor stored there. They say CMRR's mission is to analyze and understand nuclear elements.

The new lawsuit claims NNSA failed to evaluate alternatives as required under the National Environmental Policy Act.

"Despite spending millions on what turns out to be 14 pounds of after-the-fact NEPA paperwork, NNSA still has not analyzed the impacts of even one reasonable alternative," Los Alamos Study Group Director Greg Mello said in statement. "For NNSA, it's their way or the highway. Yet analysis of the environmental impacts of reasonable alternatives to a project is the very heart of NEPA."

Mello argues the country should be funding infrastructure projects "that help us save the environment, not destroy it."

Toni Chiri of the NNSA's Los Alamos Site Office said agency officials were in the process of reading the lawsuit. Citing the pending litigation, she declined to comment further.

Last year, the group filed a similar lawsuit seeking to block the project. That suit claimed the U.S. Department of Energy and NNSA violated federal law by preparing to build CMRR without a new environmental impact statement or without properly considering alternatives.

A federal judge threw that lawsuit out in June after NNSA released a new review of the project.

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Volume 15 No. 41

October 21, 2011

At the Weapons Labs/DOE Sites

AT LOS ALAMOS LOS ALAMOS STUDY GROUP TO FILE NEW CMRR-NF LAWSUIT

The Los Alamos Study Group is preparing to file a fresh lawsuit to block construction of the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement-Nuclear Facility, renewing its claim that federal officials have failed to properly review the project under the National Environmental Policy Act. The Study Group filed a similar suit in 2010, and lost in federal court in Albuquerque in a ruling that argued the litigation was not ripe because the National Nuclear Security Administration was in the midst of a new NEPA analysis. That decision is currently being appealed by the study group (*NW&M Monitor*, Vol. 15 No. 28). With the NEPA analysis completed by the National Nuclear Security Administration's final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) on the project and the Oct. 12 issuance of an Amended Record of Decision (AROD) on the project (*NW&M Monitor*, Vol. 15 No. 40), the Study Group argued in a new brief that the time is now ripe for consideration of the issue. "When Defendants announced that they were preparing a SEIS, this Court dismissed the Plaintiff's previous case based upon doctrines of prudential mootness and ripeness, stating that, should the SEIS prove unsatisfactory, Plaintiff could sue again. . . . The SEIS is totally unsatisfactory as supposed NEPA compliance," the lawsuit alleges.

In an interview with *NW&M Monitor*, Study Group director Greg Mello said the SEIS "exceeded our expectations in a negative direction. It didn't include any reasonable alternatives and they didn't have a no-action alternative. They based their SEIS on things that they already rejected and which are infeasible. They had to do that be-

cause they made their decision to build the CMRR sometime in the past, which is a serious problem."

Group: NNSA Failed to Analyze Alternatives

The suit is based on a core argument that project opponents repeatedly raised during the SEIS process—that the document failed to sufficiently analyze alternatives to proceeding with construction of CMRR-NF, and therefore violates NEPA. The CMRR-NF received its original NEPA approval in 2004, but since that time substantial changes have occurred because of increased understanding of seismic risk, substantially driving up the project's price. The NNSA argued in the SEIS and the final AROD that the only question to be considered was whether to build under the old, seismically questionable plan, or pursue the new more expensive option.

The Study Group and others contend that a fresh review of alternatives to the project is needed. The NNSA argues that the more narrow question—using old CMRR-NF plans as the "no action" alternative versus the new construction project—is all that is at issue. In their brief, the Study Group argues that the SEIS process was essentially a sham, done to bolster decisions already made, and therefore failed to meet the NEPA requirement to inform a federal decision-making process. In particular, the suit notes a September 2010 letter from Vice President Joe Biden pledging the Administration's "unequivocal commitment" to nuclear weapons complex modernization, including CMRR-NF. Such commitments are evidence that decisions were made about the project before the SEIS was even begun, the study group said.

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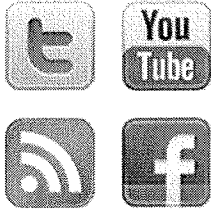
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Nuclear Weapons Projects Don't Even Qualify as Pork

By Russ Wellen, November 5, 2011

As those who read Focal Points regularly know, a facility intended to provide technical support for the production of the plutonium pits for nuclear warheads is under construction at Los Alamos National Laboratory. The pit -- which, one ventures to guess, makes the warhead the fruit of our nuclear-weapons program -- is where the chain reaction occurs. To Focal Points' surprise, the *New York Times* addressed the facility in an editorial on October 29 titled *The Bloated Nuclear Budget*, which began:

Twenty years after the end of the cold war, the United States still has about 2,500 nuclear weapons deployed and 2,600 more as backup. The Obama administration, in an attempt to mollify Congressional Republicans, has also committed to modernizing an already hugely expensive complex of nuclear labs and production facilities. Altogether, these and other nuclear-related programs could cost \$600 billion or more over the next decade. The country does not need to maintain this large an arsenal. ... especially when Congress is considering deep cuts in vital domestic programs. ... President Obama [should speed up] already negotiated reductions in deployed weapons and committing to further cuts, unilaterally if necessary.

Including

Halt construction of the new plutonium storage facility at Los Alamos National Laboratory. Costs have increased tenfold, and there are serious safety questions about the location — along a fault line and near an active volcano. Savings: \$2.9 billion.

Greg Mello is the executive director of the Los Alamos Study Group, which is leading the charge to block the facility, known as the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Facility (CMRR-NF), via the courts. The LASG is both appealing the dismissal of its case which sought a new Environmental Impact Statement (under the National Environmental Policy Act) to address those seismic concerns and is filing a second lawsuit to the same end. In the comments section of the op-ed, Mello points out that the *Times* underestimated the cost of the CMRR-NF.

The CMRR project is now expected to cost between \$4 and \$6 billion, not \$3 billion. NNSA and the Bechtel-led consortium that runs Los Alamos want to start construction a year or more before design is completed; currently the Senate would allow and fund that but the House would not. A year from now when design is 90% complete the cost may be higher; experience shows further large cost increases can be expected between now and the planned completion date in 2023.

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Continuing to look at the CMRR-NF in purely economic terms, at the *New Mexican*, Roger Snodgrass writes:

Some small-business owners in Santa Fe are opposing the proposed plutonium facility at Los Alamos National Laboratory. ... Although the group has been gathering support for several weeks, the announcement of its formation in a newspaper ad coincided with the release of a formal record of decision, a day earlier, that approved the plan to build a nuclear facility at LANL. ... "We hope New Mexicans will take more interest now, and if they want to keep some value in the real estate and attract visitors from all over the world, they better think twice about their relation with Los Alamos," said Willem Malten, the organizer of the businesses.

Also, in 2008

... 326 New Mexico businesses ... signed a "Call to Disarmament" developed by the Los Alamos Study Group. The petition called for a stop to the "design and manufacture of all nuclear weapons, including plutonium bomb cores [pits] at Los Alamos and elsewhere."

Mello, too, speaks about the effect (or lack thereof) of nuclear-weapons projects such as the CMRR-NF on the local economy in an interview with Mary-Charlotte Domandi on KSFR, Santa Fe Public Radio:

Unlike a solar or wind-energy project, which could potentially bring in hundreds of millions of dollars in capital investment and create thousands of jobs (as opposed to just 660), the CMRR, in Mello's opinion, benefits primarily the companies who already own LANL (Bechtel, the University of California, BMW), while hardly generating any long term value. "It doesn't train people to do anything in the economy," observed Mello. "It doesn't provide any infrastructure, in that it functions in the real economy (there are no goods or services provided, since no one buys or sells nuclear pits). And it attracts no private capital."

Or as Andrew Lichterman, also a member of the LASG, as well as the Western States Legal Foundation and Reaching Critical Will, writes: Even though the CMRR-NF is

... by far the largest government construction project in New Mexico history aside from the interstate highway system [much] of this money will flow to contractors based elsewhere, as Los Alamos is now managed by a consortium including such huge multinational nuclear industry players as Bechtel and B&W. Complex high tech military construction projects create fewer jobs per dollar than most other types of public spending, and even fewer permanent positions. The end result for New Mexico, where Los Alamos County residents have a per capita income over 4 times that of the poorest county, will be further economic stratification.

Nuclear-weapons projects are of so little benefit to the economy of the state that they don't even qualify as pork. Lichterman explains who they benefit and how. Take a moment to digest his thoughts: if you're like me, you haven't seen nuclear weapons viewed in exactly this light before.

The nuclear road provides elites in that sector with privileged access to their own country's resources, a development context that can be shielded from foreign competition, and forms of trade and industry that can be portrayed as increasing in importance as fossil fuels diminish. The powerful tools of nationalism and "national security" secrecy both facilitate the extraction of wealth from the rest of society and prevent scrutiny of national nuclear enterprises that ... have been rife with technical problems, corruption, and widespread, intractable environmental impacts. Nuclear technology, with its vision of near-magical, limitless power (an image its purveyors energetically

promote), casts a positive aura over other big, centralized high-tech development programs that are profitable for elites, but have little or even negative value for much of the population in an ever more stratified world.

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November 14, 2011

A Nuclear Facility We Don't Need

By GREG MELLO

Los Alamos, N.M.

It has been over 20 years since the end of the cold war, and yet the United States continues to spend enormous sums on its nuclear arsenal and related programs. In fact, rather than looking for ways to save money in this budget-conscious time, the National Nuclear Security Administration is asking for even more money to build one of its most unnecessary projects yet: a second big plutonium facility at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

The facility, which the administration says it needs to produce more nuclear warhead cores, called pits, would cost between \$4 billion and \$6 billion to build, and roughly a quarter billion a year to operate. Strikingly, despite the decade (and about \$450 million) spent developing the proposal, the administration still doesn't have a firm cost estimate or a final design. That hasn't kept it from asking for money, though: this year it is requesting an additional \$270 million to continue planning, part of a proposed \$621 million increase for warhead management.

A better cost estimate may be available in early 2013, when the final design nears completion, though the administration hopes to begin construction long before that, in January 2012, if Congress allows it. Even after that, experience strongly suggests that further cost increases are likely between now and 2023, when the project is expected to finally come online. By then it will be needed even less than it is now; by the time it is completed the entire nuclear arsenal, except for cruise missile warheads, will have been successfully upgraded without this investment.

The laboratory needs fewer grand ambitions, not more space. Its existing plutonium facility, which has about twice the space inside as the proposed one, already has a high-capacity manufacturing line that takes up just a third of the building. Why does the nuclear administration need to produce more pits, let alone at a faster rate? Scientists agree that the existing stock of pits will last a century or so without replacement. There are also large reserves of extra warheads and pits for each delivery system, more than enough to replace every warhead and bomb deployed.

The nuclear administration says it needs more capacity to facilitate large-scale production of pits for “replacement,” i.e., to produce new types of warheads. It optimistically claims that such new designs can be certified in the absence of nuclear testing. The new building would be built to handle the large steel tanks needed for the explosive “subcritical tests” and “scaled experiments” that are considered helpful in certifying these otherwise untested replacement warheads.

The new building would also house a large new vault containing “the plutonium stores of the nation,” as Don Cook, the administration’s deputy director, has said. Yet the administration already has nuclear storage facilities in South Carolina and Nevada, which are more than sufficient. Meanwhile, it is spending additional billions on other questionable plutonium facilities to dispose of excess plutonium around the country and is even emptying a large modern plutonium facility in Livermore, Calif.

One reason the facility’s estimated costs continue to rise is a new appreciation of how the region’s seismic profile affects the design of the facility. The proposed facility would sit above a thick layer of loose volcanic ash, which amplifies seismic accelerations and provides little resistance to sliding. The entire Los Alamos laboratory complex sits on a fault system capable of shallow magnitude 7.3 earthquakes that give rise to sharp high accelerations.

To top it off, the administration is still not even sure how to design the building: whether to anchor the bunkerlike structure deep in the mesa or let it “float” up near the surface, its upper part protected by earthen berms.

There are alternatives — simpler, faster, cheaper and safer ones — but the nuclear administration refuses to examine them. For example, it could make better use of existing facilities, which were very costly to acquire and are very expensive to maintain and make safe, but which are not being used efficiently. But the nuclear administration and its predecessor agency within the Department of Energy have been continuously on the Government Accountability Office’s watch list of agencies most prone to waste and poor management since the list began 20 years ago.

Even setting these criticisms aside, the case for building more nuclear weapons, at a time when the United States’ arsenal is already by far the most sophisticated and most expensive in the world is growing harder to make. The Congressional supercommittee, which will soon wrap up its plans for cutting federal spending, might or might not want to touch the politics of maintaining our nuclear arsenal — but cutting resources for this dangerous and unnecessary project should be something every member of Congress can get behind.

Greg Mello is the executive director of the Los Alamos Study Group, a nuclear disarmament

20 of 1000 DOCUMENTS

The Associated Press State & Local Wire

November 17, 2011 Thursday 11:46 PM GMT

Board questions adequacy of LANL seismic efforts

BYLINE: By JERI CLAUSING, Associated Press

SECTION: STATE AND REGIONAL

LENGTH: 659 words

DATELINE: SANTA FE N.M.

Los Alamos National Laboratory is nearing completion of structural work designed to ensure the country's premier plutonium lab can withstand a major earthquake, but safety oversight board members said Thursday they remain concerned the fixes are inadequate to protect the public from a major radioactive release.

"You need to ensure adequate protection at every moment of the day," Peter Winokur, chairman of the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board said during a public hearing where he and other member of the Congressionally appointed board grilled lab officials about their priorities as well as their definitions of "adequate protection for public and workers."

"We are a little frustrated," he said, "and we haven't heard anything compelling here today" to allay the board's ongoing concerns about whether seismic threat were being properly addressed.

Lab officials, on the other hand said they were confident of their efforts to shore up the 1970s-era facility known as PF-4, which is the nation's primary center for working with the dangerous plutonium that used in nuclear weapons.

"From a seismic perspective, I would feel safer in PF 4 than in my own home," LANL Director Charles McMillan said.

Safety, he said, is "unequivocally ... our highest priority at the lab."

Other lab officials repeated their confidence that the main plutonium facility, known as PF 4, was safer than their homes.

But Winokur questioned whether that confidence about the lab's structure extended to protecting the public from radioactive releases should a major quake occur along nearby fault lines and spark a fire or other problem at the plutonium facility.

Work to retrofit the aging Plutonium Facility should be complete next year, but upgrades to the lab's fire suppression system won't be finished until 2013 and a ventilation system to contain a major radioactive release won't be complete until 2020 -- assuming Congress funds the project.

"This should be a priority in your funding requests," said Winokur.

Greg Mello, with the watchdog Los Alamos Study Group, urged the board to go to the White House to ensure property safety standards are adopted -- and enacted.

"We do not believe the (National Nuclear Security Administration) is capable of setting sound priorities," he said.

"We do not accept 2020 as good enough" for installing an adequate ventilation system. "To us, 2020 means whenever."

PF-4 is one of two aging buildings at the lab where plutonium work is done. Since new studies in 2007 showed the potential

for a major earthquake along faults in the area could occur every few thousand years -- more frequently than previously thought -- LANL has been working to make sure the building meets more stringent seismic standards. It also has taken the initial steps to replace the even older second plutonium lab, known as the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research, at a cost that could reach close to \$6 billion.

Safety concerns, however, have swirled around both projects for years. The oversight board, which makes recommendations to Congress, has been instrumental in pushing for stronger safeguards.

Given the amount of plutonium at the PF 4 -- the only building in the country equipped for making the pits that power nuclear weapons, "I don't understand how you conclude adequate protection," Winkour said to a panel of officials from National Nuclear Security Administration, an arm of the Department of Energy that oversees the nation's nuclear facilities and contractors.

Donald Cook, deputy administrator for Defense Programs at NNSA, said that based on estimates that the risk of a major quake at the facility is only 1 to 1.5 percent over the facility's lifetime, a "conservative estimate right now is the risk to the public is on the order of one in ten thousand than the risk from all other sources."

"The definition of risk is that it is the combination of the probability of something occurring and the consequence of what it is that happens," he said.

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Global Security Newswire
by National Journal Group

Daily news on nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, terrorism and related issues.

DOE Auditor Calls for Restructuring National Labs

Friday, Nov. 18, 2011

The Energy Department's internal watchdog on Tuesday released a report calling for a massive reorganization of the department's laboratories, including those that perform nuclear weapons work, the *New York Times* reported (see GSN, Oct. 28).

DOE inspector general Gregory Friedman warned that the department was undoubtedly going to face "painful" personnel layoffs due to looming spending cuts that are expected as a response to the federal government's massive deficit.

Friedman criticized the Energy Department's spending of approximately \$13 billion annually to operate 16 different laboratories, though only roughly 50 percent of that amount is used on research activities. He advised merging some activities in order to bring down overhead.

Three of the department's laboratories focus on nuclear weapons work: the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California and the Los Alamos and Sandia national laboratories in New Mexico.

The auditor recommended that an independent committee be established to look at options for merging Energy Department laboratories. He also advised that the department's semiautonomous National Nuclear Security Administration be fully brought back under department control to lower costs and redundancies. The branch, which oversees the national laboratories and other nuclear weapon operations, was created in 2000 due to security worries (Matthew Wald, *New York Times*, Nov. 15).

The report arrives at a time when congressional backers of strong U.S. nuclear weapons complex spending are attempting to undo a vote by the full House that would reduce NNSA weapons spending by close to \$500 million in this fiscal year.

Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.) told the *Albuquerque Journal* that he was skeptical that Friedman's recommendations would receive much consideration by lawmakers.

"I haven't heard any serious conversation about it in Congress or here in Washington," the New Mexico lawmaker said (John Fleck, *Albuquerque Journal* I, Nov. 17).

Meanwhile, the facility used to generate plutonium at Los Alamos might require between \$150 million and \$300 million in seismic shock reinforcements that could take until the end of the decade to finish, the *Journal* reported.

The figures and time line were provided in a September assessment provided by Los Alamos managers to the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, which convened on Thursday in Santa Fe (John Fleck, *Albuquerque Journal* II, Nov. 17).

One board member said the panel was not fully confident that the enhancements were strong enough to ensure that surrounding populations would not be exposed to harmful radioactive emissions in the event of an earthquake at the plutonium laboratory, the Associated Press reported.

"You need to ensure adequate protection at every moment of the day," board chairman Peter Winokur said.

He told Los Alamos officials who had given presentations at the meeting that "we are a little frustrated ... and we haven't heard anything compelling here today" to assuage worries about radioactive releases following an earthquake.

Los Alamos officials said they had faith in the improvements being made to the four-decade-old PF-4 facility.

While the retrofit improvements to the plutonium building are to be finished in 2012, enhancements to the facility's fire extinguishing system are not to be completed until the following year. An air freshening system is not anticipated to be finished before 2020 and that is only if Capitol Hill allocates funds for the project.

"This should be a priority in your funding requests," Winokur said.

Greg Mello of the nonprofit Los Alamos Study Group said, "We do not believe the (National Nuclear Security Administration) is capable of setting sound priorities."

"We do not accept 2020 as good enough" for finishing work on the air freshening system. "To us, 2020 means whenever," Mello said (Jeri Clausing, Associated Press/*The Republic*, Nov. 17).

[^ back to top](#)

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11/27/11

LANL Project an Unsafe Taxpayer Boondoggle

By Peter Neils
Los Alamos Study Group

The Chemical and Metallurgy Research Replacement-Nuclear Facility project at Los Alamos National Laboratory is finally achieving national visibility. A recent New York Times' editorial singled it out as an unnecessary and wasteful project that ought not be pursued.

Some in Congress, and elsewhere in government, are wondering if it is not only unnecessary, but unaffordable as well.

In 2009, the new Obama administration initially agreed with many who thought that this project needed a fundamental reassessment, given its dramatic cost increases, improved understanding of tenuous seismic conditions at the site, and the vanishing need for plutonium "pit" production that had previously justified the project.

This Trojan horse was scoped in 2001 as a relatively modest \$375 million replacement of the old CMR building with capability to store and handle 900 grams of plutonium at a time. By 2003 its requirements had grown to include storage for 6 metric tons of plutonium, with 300 kilograms on the shop floor at a time.

It subsequently morphed, with no environmental review, to twice the original size and, at the top end of the National Nuclear Security Administration's steadily escalating cost range, over 16 times its original cost.

The building would be "the nation's storehouse" of plutonium, located directly above approximately 40 percent of all the wetlands on lab property.

Highlighted as the "#1 Boondoggle of 2009" by Newsmax. com, this questionably justified hole in the ground still has no final design, construction cost or estimated life cycle cost; this after spending nearly half a billion dollars, more than the total cost of the original project, on planning.

A deficiency in any one of these should be enough to give any responsible congressman or senator pause before proceeding with it, more so those who take their public trust seriously.

Yet, not the building's constantly evolving mission, not NNSA's abandonment of DOE project development guide lines, nor even blatant violations of the National Environmental Policy Act have shaken our congressional delegation's dedication to it.

There are alternatives to this project — cheaper, simpler, better ones — and that is why we have sued to force NNSA to consider them. It's the law under the National Environmental Policy Act.

Assuming construction costs of \$4 billion to \$6 billion over nine years, and using NNSA's figure of an average of 420 construction jobs/year, that's an investment of \$1 million to 1.6 million per job/year. Many of these jobs would be filled by highly skilled, out-of-state, certified nuclear facility workers, not New Mexicans.

According to NNSA it will result in no net gain in permanent jobs.

In contrast to this boondoggle, why not invest that half billion dollars/year over the next decade in programs would that incentivize renewable energy projects and energy conservation initiatives, for once investing in the future of this state? Such revised priorities could create tens of thousands of new, well-paying careers for New Mexicans while moving America toward energy independence.

One might ask, is it New Mexicans whom our delegation represents, or the contractors that run the labs?

This project, the most costly single construction project in New Mexico's history, should be reconsidered. A single letter from a congressman or senator could do it.

Senators Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall, as well as Reps. Martin Heinrich and Ben Ray Lujan, who pride themselves on their environmental credentials, are deaf to sensible critiques of the project from their constituents. Rep. Steve Pearce who identifies himself with fiscally responsible government, is, in spite of our present difficult economic circumstances, silent.

To request an investigation into reasonable alternatives to the CMRR-NF would be responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars, and while it may be almost unprecedented to turn away wasteful pork-barrel spending in one's state, in this case it would distinguish them as advocates of good governance.

[^ back to top](#)

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19 of 1000 DOCUMENTS

The Associated Press State & Local Wire

November 29, 2011 Tuesday 11:40 PM GMT

Court to hear appeal of nuke lab suit

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DATELINE: ALBUQUERQUE N.M.

A federal appeals court has agreed to consider a watchdog group's lawsuit to halt construction of a new \$6 billion plutonium lab at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

The 10th Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver Tuesday agreed to consider the merits of the appeal by the **Los Alamos Study Group**. The group filed a lawsuit last year to halt development of the so-called Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement nuclear facility. The group alleged the Department of Energy and the National Nuclear Security Administration violated federal law by failing to do a new environmental impact statement after changing the design for project to address seismic and other safety concerns

A federal judge in Albuquerque in June threw out the group's lawsuit.

Officials at Los Alamos have since begun moving forward with the project. And the watchdog group has filed a second lawsuit alleging they failed to consider alternatives to the project.

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Nuclear Money Pit

America's atomic arsenal is stuck in the Cold War era.

by KELLEY BEAUCAR VLAHOS

These days superpower nuclear-weapons controversies hardly elicit the excitement that once inspired such bumper-sticker slogans as, “you can’t hug children with nuclear arms.” The “no nukes!” movement has gone the way of the Cold War and MTV playing music videos, right?

In the 21st century, the 2002 Treaty of Moscow and 2010’s New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) were supposed set the clock on bilateral war-head reduction, and there are no plans for the production of more nuclear weapons. Pretty cut and dried, one would think. But like everything radiating out of Washington, the atomic drawdown is not what it seems.

Despite a deficit reduction plan to cut \$1.2 trillion in federal spending over 10 years and ongoing negotiations by the so-called supercommittee to identify cuts of \$1.5 trillion more, members of Congress are pushing an expanded plutonium storage and production assistance facility at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico. Critics say the facility is unnecessary, poorly designed, and dangerous—there are fault lines throughout the Los Alamos property—and its cost has ballooned from \$375 million in 2001 to an estimated \$5.5 billion today.

It hasn’t been built yet—in fact, the designs aren’t even finished after 10 years. But the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility (CMRR-NF) has been soaking up taxpayer money all the same as the scope of the project has metastasized.

“The country doesn’t have money to pour into an unnecessary, giant boondoggle that has grown beyond all original expectations,” charges Greg Mello, executive director of the Los Alamos Study Group, probably the toughest grassroots opposition the CMRR-NF project faces right now. “When the cost

of a facility increases by more than a factor of ten, even as the fundamental purposes are evaporating, it’s important to stop, to pause and to question whether this is the right thing to do.”

There is no doubt that the budget-cutting imperative is clashing with the old way of doing business on Capitol Hill, as pet projects and earmarks come under more scrutiny than ever. Bureaucratic institutions used to getting their way by easing expensive, potentially controversial programs under the radar are finding themselves squarely in critics’ sights.

That includes CMRR-NF, which has never been the subject of a public congressional hearing or passionate floor speech—much less a heated debate on cable TV or talk radio—but has been controversial nonetheless.

“I think the key is, it appears to be a huge waste of money and particularly in our current fiscal situation there is no need to hurry this thing at all,” says Peter Stockton, senior investigator for the Project on Government Oversight, which is currently working on its own CMRR-NF report.

The mission of National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), which is a semi-autonomous agency of the U.S. Department of Energy, is to “improve national security through the military application of nuclear energy.” It oversees Los Alamos and is in charge of the CMRR project.

Initially, the NNSA was merely focused on renovating the parts of Los Alamos’s old Chemistry and Metallurgy Research (CMR) building that were outmoded and deteriorating by the late 1990s. Tests had found faults running under the property that could cause dangerous earthquakes.

After President George W. Bush was elected, plans

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos is a Washington, D.C.-based freelance reporter and a columnist for Antiwar.com.

to improve and upgrade salvageable portions of the nearly 60-year-old CMR were scrapped, and NNSA set about designing a “simple” replacement facility with two buildings about a mile away. One, the Radiological Laboratory Utility Office Building, is not controversial and almost complete. The other—the NF in CMRR-NF—is a new nuclear facility that would support Los Alamos’s nuclear-weapons mission, including plutonium storage, and assist in the production of plutonium-based “pits,” the fissile cores of nuclear weapons. This currently takes place at the existing TA-55/PF-4 nuclear facility next to the proposed site.

The nuclear facility, according to its critics, has become a monster. Aside from the runaway cost estimates, according to Mello the envisioned facility would give TA-55/PF-4 the capacity to double the number of pits Los Alamos produces each year and could store up to six metric tons of plutonium, “enough to rebuild the entire U.S. strategic arsenal.” This when there are thousands of pits already in storage and a treaty with the Russians sharply limits the nuclear arsenal.

Even if the increase in pit production were necessary—and as Mello and others point out, with much of the information classified or otherwise unavailable to the public, it is hard to know—the existing lab could be upgraded to carry out Los Alamos’s publicly stated mission to refurbish the current stockpile. NNSA, critics complain, has so far refused to seriously consider any alternative.

“We think there are simpler, cheaper, faster alternatives to accomplishing their stated mission, though their stated missions are aggrandized to begin with,” says Los Alamos Study Group President Peter Neils, who was on Capitol Hill in late October to get the word out about CMRR-NF. He blames the out-of-control designs and spiraling cost on a mix of Cold War ideology, over-reliance on contractors, and the self-sustaining mentality of all bureaucracies.

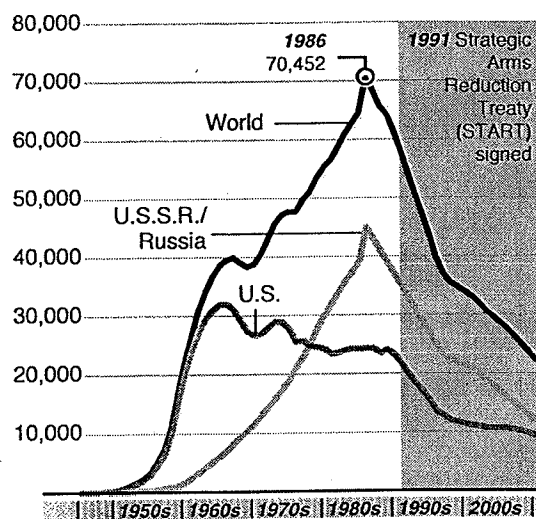
Simply put, says Mello, “the warhead establishment and the Cold War hawks cannot let go of designing and building new kinds of warheads, to create what they call ‘end-to-end’ work for the weapons complex.”

As of June, the Federation of American Scientists reports, the U.S. had 1,950 operational strategic nuclear warheads, plus approximately 200 deployed on behalf of allied countries—Belgium, Turkey, Netherlands, Italy and Germany—and 2,850 in reserve. In addition, some 3,500 retired warheads are awaiting dismantlement. This

all jibes with numbers issued by the State Department in 2010. START demands that the U.S. bring those deployed numbers down closer to 1,550 by 2018.

At its peak in 1967 during the Cold War, the nuclear stockpile was at 31,225 warheads. America had 22,217 when the Berlin Wall fell in 1989. If the Cold War were still on, say critics, we might need additional capacity to build pits. But as it is there are thousands of usable pits already in reserve, and the scientific consensus says the plutonium parts of the pits have a lifespan of at least 100 years. The U.S. arsenal is well stocked in this regard.

Nuclear warhead stockpiles

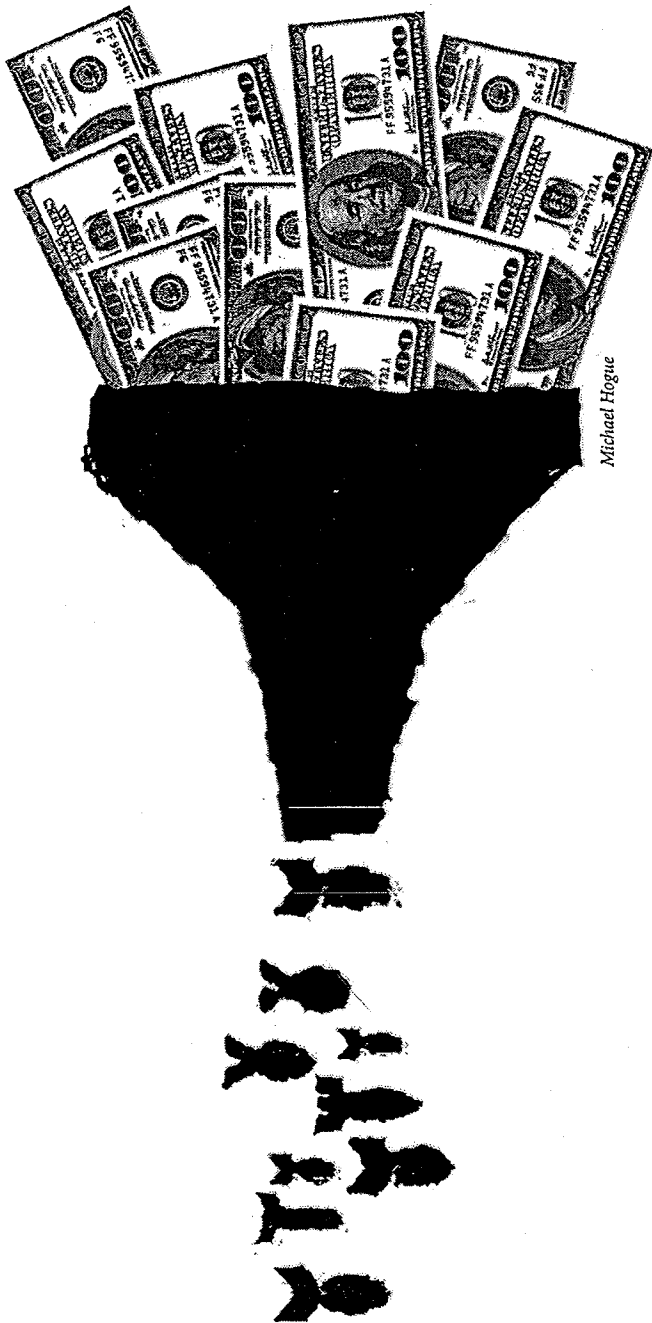


SOURCE: Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists

The new CMRR-NF would help Los Alamos’s TA-55/PF4 site boost production to a conservative estimate of 125 pits a year on a double shift, according to observers.

This is as outrageous as it is unnecessary, claims Frank von Hippel, a professor and principal investigator at Princeton University’s Program on Science and Global Security, in an affidavit for the Los Alamos Study Group, which is trying to force NNSA’s hand in court.

“There is no anticipated need to produce new pits for U.S. nuclear weapons for several decades,” he writes. The oldest pit produced in the U.S. is 32 years old, he added, noting the current TA-55/PF-4’s production rate of 10 pits per year would be adequate for any replacements necessary during the modernization and maintenance that is already going on under the auspices of NNSA.



Critics say the entire landscape of nuclear-weapons production has changed since CMRR-NF was conceived—all in the direction of reducing the nuclear stockpile—yet every adjustment in the facility’s blueprints has resulted in more capacity to store plutonium and build additional pits.

Most notably, the Reliable Replacement Warhead, a new family of warheads conceived in 2004 and used as a chief justification for modernizing Los Alamos’s nuclear-weapons complex, was defunded by Congress and cancelled by the Obama Administration in 2009.

CMRR-NF “is being built to increase capacity for

pit production, even though pit production is not what we need,” the Project on Government Oversight’s Stockton charges. NNSA did not respond to several phone calls for comment on these and other charges lobbied by the opposition.

A three-page “Questions and Answers Regarding the CMRR Project” issued by NNSA before the Reliable Replacement Warhead was canceled maintains that the “primary mission of CMRR will be to support the current nuclear weapons stockpile through surveillance and life-extension programs necessary for the nuclear weapons complex” and “the size of CMRR remains the same.” It blames the soaring expense on poor initial estimates, cost increases in “the construction industry worldwide,” and requirements relating to the seismic risks, nuclear quality assurance, and security. The words “fissile core” or “pit” are never mentioned.

NNSA also contends it has put alternatives up for public comment, most recently when it amended the plans under its Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, which the agency says has incorporated “updated seismic safety design information.” (The Los Alamos Study Group disagrees and has filed a second lawsuit against NNSA, contending that it’s relying on outdated feasibility and impact studies, among other charges.)

Critics say that if the new facility’s mission is merely to help maintain the stockpile, the job could be handled at an improved and upgraded TF-22/P4 facility or elsewhere at a fraction of the cost. As for size, Mello says NNSA can no longer say the facility is “the same”—the square footage might be, but the installation’s scope has certainly grown since 2001.

CMRR-NF is not without detractors on Capitol Hill. Over the years, its budget and plans have been questioned for all of the reasons already cited and more. Indeed, today’s fiscal environment has bolstered the criticism, with results that can be seen in competing House and Senate appropriations bills. (Some \$450 million has been appropriated to CMRR since 2002.)

Calling it a “cost reduction strategy,” the House in July cut \$100 million from NNSA’s \$300 million request for CMRR-NF as part of the overall \$30.6 billion Fiscal Year 2012 Water and Energy Appropriations package. “The [House and Water and Energy Subcommittee] fully supports the Administration’s plans to modernize the infrastructure, but intends to closely review the funding request for new investment to ensure those plans adhere to good project management practices,” the final bill reads.

By trimming the agency's request by a third, the House is refusing to provide "the additional funding to support early construction" and would not do so until NNSA resolves "major seismic issues with design" and tames CMRR's cost.

The Senate subcommittee, too, has expressed concerns. Pointing to the growing expense, its FY 2012 appropriations bill demands NNSA submit a contingency plan that would identify the cost and consequences of delaying the implementation of CMRR, as well as a planned Uranium Processing Facility at Oak Ridge, Tennessee—another project that has gone from an estimated \$1.5 billion to upwards of \$6.5 billion in the last five years. The committee also proposes to cut \$60 million from the NNSA's \$300 million request for CMRR, but allows for preliminary "site preparation"—in other words, construction may begin on a project whose designs are not yet finished.

Mello and Neils have tried to convince lawmakers to put a permanent stop to CMRR-NF. It's a difficult task, they say. Many legislators are hearing about the issue for the first time and might not be willing to plough through intimidating scientific and technical jargon to get at why this project is bad news.

And CMRR-NF already has momentum. Mike Lofgren, who spent 28 years on Capitol Hill as an aide on defense issues for the House and Senate Budget Committees, says this is bureaucracy in action, and anything relating to weapons systems is going to be expensive.

"It doesn't surprise me that after a requirement has gone away, or the need has been severely curtailed, they would just continue on with this thing," Lofgren tells *TAC*. "These projects get front-loaded by optimistic projections of their cost and overstatements of, 'hey, we really need this thing,' so you front-load them and politically engineer them by getting the local congressmen all hyped up by saying it's going to create new jobs."

When lawmakers start asking whether a particular project is really worth it, the response, Lofgren says, is always, "it's too early to tell or too late to stop" and the effort will go on until the money is gone, mission accomplished or not. One need look no further than the \$65 billion fleet of F-22 Raptors, which was grounded from May to August because of operational problems and has never seen a day of combat.

It's hard to get a firm handle on how CMRR-NF has come to be apparently unstoppable because no wants to talk—neither the detractors on the Energy and Water Development Subcommittees, nor the project's proponents, who have long been led by figures like Sen. John Kyl (R-Ariz.). In fact, reports at the time of Senate negotiations over New START indicate that as Republican Senate whip, Kyl was successful in obtaining additional funds for CMRR-NF in exchange for Senate GOP support for Obama's treaty with the Russians. Kyl's office did not return calls for comment.

A spokeswoman for Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), known as a longtime supporter of the CMRR proj-

When lawmakers start asking whether a particular project is really worth it, the response, Lofgren says, is always, "it's too early to tell or too late to stop."

ect, responded with a statement from the senator that hardly sounded like a ringing endorsement.

"The CMRR is an important project for [Los Alamos National Laboratory] and for New Mexico, but it is also important to be sure environmental and cost issues are fully addressed," Bingaman said. "My top concern as the project has been developed continues to be safety and security of the proposed facility."

Contractors, post-Cold War ideologues, and bureaucracy may keep the CMRR-NF project going, but those interests appear to be clashing directly with the forces of fiscal restraint and new environmental concerns. After the earthquake-spawned Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster in Japan last spring, fears over seismic hazards at Los Alamos have only grown.

Meanwhile, the Los Alamos Study Group insists its goal is not to stop the U.S. nuclear program, but to make it safer, more efficient and less expensive.

The nuclear-weapons establishment "could do their job more efficiently and more cheaply if they didn't infuse their work with so much ideology and were just more practical and straightforward," says Mello. And CMRR-NF is not the only program that might demand additional scrutiny. According to the *New York Times*, the facility is just one of a host of modernization projects that could cost taxpayers over \$600 billion in the next decade. ■

16 of 1000 DOCUMENTS

The Associated Press

December 4, 2011 Sunday 07:07 PM GMT

Questions swirl around \$6 billion nuclear lab

BYLINE: By JERI CLAUSING, Associated Press

SECTION: DOMESTIC NEWS

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DATELINE: SANTA FE, N.M.

At Los Alamos National Laboratory, scientists and engineers refer to their planned new \$6 billion nuclear lab by its clunky acronym, CMRR, short for Chemistry Metallurgy Research Replacement Facility. But as a work in progress for three decades and with hundreds of millions of dollars already spent, nomenclature is among the minor issues.

Questions continue to swirl about exactly what kind of nuclear and plutonium research will be done there, whether the lab is really necessary, and perhaps most important will it be safe, or could it become New Mexico's equivalent of Japan's Fukushima?

As federal officials prepare the final design plans for the controversial and very expensive lab, increased scrutiny is being placed on what in recent years has been discovered to be a greater potential for a major earthquake along the fault lines that have carved out the stunning gorges, canyons and valleys that surround the nation's premier nuclear weapons facility in northern New Mexico.

Final preparations for the lab whose the high-end price tag estimate of \$5.8 billion is almost \$1 billion more than New Mexico's annual state budget and more than double the lab's annual budget also comes as a cash-strapped Congress looks to trim defense spending and cut cleanup budgets at contaminated facilities like Los Alamos. It also comes as the inspector general recommends that the federal government consider consolidating its far-flung network of research labs.

Despite the uncertainty, the National Nuclear Safety Administration, an arm of the Department of Energy that oversees the nation's nuclear labs, is moving forward on final designs for the lab. Project director Herman Le-Doux says it has been redesigned with input from the nation's leading seismic experts, and the NNSA has "gone to great extremes" to ensure the planned building could withstand an earthquake of up to 7.3 magnitude.

Most seismic experts agree that would be a worst-case scenario for the area. But many people who live near the lab and have seen it twice threatened by massive wildfires in 10 years see no reason for taking the chance.

"The Department of Energy has learned nothing from the Fukushima disaster," said David McCoy, director of the environmental and nuclear watchdog group Citizens Action New Mexico, at a recent oversight hearing. That's become a common refrain since last year's earthquake and tsunami in Japan caused a meltdown at one of its nuclear plants. "The major lesson of Fukushima is ignored by NNSA: Don't build dangerous facilities in unsafe natural settings."

Lab officials say CMRR is needed to replace a 1940s era facility that is beyond renovation yet crucial to supporting its mission as the primary center for maintaining and developing the country's stockpile of nuclear weapons. While much of the work is classified, they insist the lab's mission is to do analytical work to support the nearby Plutonium Facility, or PF-4, which is the only building in the country equipped for making the pits that power nuclear weapons.

Watchdog groups, however, call it an effort by the DOE and NNSA to escalate the production of new nuclear weapons and

turn what has largely been a research facility into a bomb factory.

And they are not giving up their efforts to halt the project. The **Los Alamos Study Group**, headed by Greg Mello, one of a number of area activists who have made a career out of monitoring LANL, has two lawsuits challenging the project and what he says is the federal government's refusal to look at alternatives despite the increased seismic threats uncovered in 2007 that have sent the price tag soaring.

Mello spends his days poring over every available public document on Los Alamos and the nation's nuclear program. And he makes frequent trips to Washington to lobby against funding for CMRR, which he says is an unnecessary attempt to "open the door for an overall expansion in intensity and scale" of the nation's nuclear weapons program.

At just about every public hearing related to the labs, Mello lines up with a regular group of aging hippies, retired scientists, former lab employees, residents of nearby pueblos as well as housewives and grandmothers from Santa Fe and other neighboring communities to oppose CMRR and anything and everything related to an expansion or continuation of the nuclear mission at Los Alamos.

While much of the public outcry over Los Alamos in recent years has focused on lagging cleanup efforts of radioactive waste and hazardous runoff into the canyons that drain into the Rio Grande, earthquake danger and the potential for catastrophic releases of radiation from existing facilities was front and center at a recent meeting in Santa Fe of the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, appointed by Congress to oversee the nation's nuclear facilities.

"The board believes that no safety issue problem in (the nation's nuclear complex) is more pressing than the plutonium facility's vulnerability to a large earthquake," the board's chairman, Peter Winokur said in reference to efforts to reinforce PF-4.

The board has worked closely with NNSA to ensure CMRR is designed to withstand a major quake, so Winokur said the board is not concerned about that project "as long as they follow through."

It's that follow through that has watchdogs concerned.

"Los Alamos doesn't have that safety ethos needed for a facility that will store the bulk of the nation's stockpile of plutonium," Mello said

Winokur agreed that safety remains a concern at the lab.

Since the last contractor took over operations in 2006, he said, "It's fair to say they have improved safety at the sites." But he pointed to two recent memos about deficiencies in nuclear safety programs that he said underscore the fact "that the operations out there are very challenging and that there is plenty of room for improvement."

Asked if he thought it was wise to spend billions of dollars to keep the nation's nuclear weapons operations centered on an earthquake-prone mesa, Winokur said his mandate from Congress is to oversee safety, not second guess major policy decisions.

"I'll leave that to Congress and DOE about whether or not they want to build a facility of that nature in that region of the country where they do have a fairly large earthquake threat," Winokur said.

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14 of 1000 DOCUMENTS

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New nuclear lab generates questions

BYLINE: by Jeri Clausingby Jeri Clausing

SECTION: A section; Pg. A17

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SANTA FE, N.M. - At Los Alamos National Laboratory, scientists and engineers refer to their planned new multibillion-dollar nuclear lab by its clunky abbreviation, CMRR, short for Chemistry Metallurgy Research Replacement Facility. But as a work in progress for three decades and with hundreds of millions of dollars already spent, it has issues bigger than nomenclature.

Questions continue to swirl about exactly what kind of nuclear and plutonium research will be done there, whether the lab is really necessary, and - perhaps most important - will it be safe, or could it become New Mexico's equivalent of Japan's Fukushima?

As federal officials prepare the final design plans for the lab, increased scrutiny is being placed on the potential for a major earthquake along the fault lines in northern New Mexico that carved out the stunning gorges, canyons and valleys that surround the nation's premier nuclear weapons facility.

The new lab also comes with a price tag estimate of \$5.8 billion, almost \$1 billion more than New Mexico's annual state budget and more than double the national lab's total annual budget. That's a big expenditure at a time when a cash-strapped Congress looks to trim defense spending.

Despite the uncertainty, the National Nuclear Safety Administration, an arm of the Energy Department that oversees the nation's nuclear labs, is moving forward on final designs for the lab.

Project director Herman LeDoux says it has been redesigned with input from the nation's leading seismic experts, and the agency has "gone to great extremes" to ensure the planned building could withstand an earthquake of up to 7.3 magnitude. Most seismic experts agree that would be a worst-case scenario for the area, but many people who live near the lab see no reason for taking such chances.

"The Department of Energy has learned nothing from the Fukushima disaster," David McCoy, executive director of Citizens Action New Mexico, an environmental and nuclear watchdog group, said at a recent oversight hearing. That's become a common refrain since an earthquake and tsunami struck in Japan in March, causing a series of equipment failures that led to the release of radioactive materials at a nuclear plant in Fukushima.

"The major lesson of Fukushima is ignored by NNSA: Don't build dangerous facilities in unsafe natural settings," McCoy said.

Officials at Los Alamos say the new lab is needed to replace a 1940s-era facility that is beyond renovation yet crucial to supporting its mission as the primary center for maintaining and developing the country's stockpile of nuclear weapons. Though much of the work is classified, they insist the lab's mission is to do analytical work to support the nearby Plutonium Facility, or PF-4, which is the only building in the country equipped for making the cores that power nuclear weapons.

Watchdog groups, however, call it an effort to escalate the production of new nuclear weapons and turn what has largely been a research facility into a bomb factory, and they aren't giving up their efforts to stop the project.

The Los Alamos Study Group has two lawsuits challenging the project and what the group says is the federal government's refusal to look at alternatives despite increased seismic threats uncovered in 2007 that have sent the price tag soaring. The group's leader, Greg Mello, spends his days poring over every available public document on Los Alamos and the nation's nuclear program. And he makes frequent trips to Washington to lobby against funding for the new lab.

"Los Alamos doesn't have that safety ethos needed for a facility that will store the bulk of the nation's stockpile of plutonium," Mello said

Peter Winokur, chairman of the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, which was appointed by Congress to oversee the nation's nuclear facilities, agreed that safety remains a concern at the lab, but he said his board has worked closely with the nuclear safety agency to ensure the new lab is designed to withstand a major quake, so the board is not concerned about that project - "as long as they follow through."

"It's fair to say they have improved safety at the sites" since the last contractor took over operations in 2006, Winokur said. But he pointed to two recent memos about deficiencies in nuclear safety programs that he said underscore the fact "that the operations out there are very challenging and that there is plenty of room for improvement."

Asked if he thought it was wise to spend billions of dollars to keep the nation's nuclear weapons operations centered on an earthquake-prone mesa, Winokur, a former manager of the radiation technology and assurance department at Sandia National Laboratories, said his mandate from Congress is to oversee safety, not second guess major policy decisions.

"I'll leave that to Congress and DOE," Winokur said.

- Associated Press

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December 5, 2011 8:54 AM

Debate over \$6B Los Alamos nuke lab

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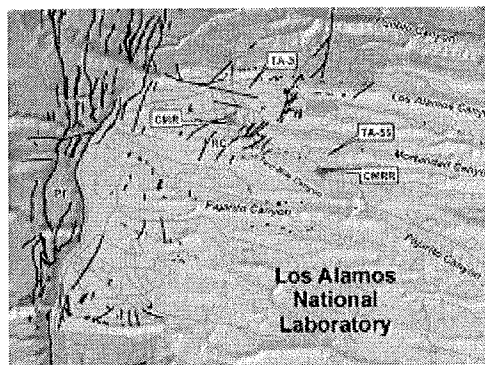
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Mapped fault lines in the Los Alamos National Laboratory area.

(Credit: Dept. of Energy)

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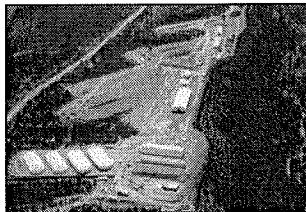
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1

Overdose

Is LANL exposing the public to excessive risk?

Wren Abbott



Although the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board estimates that, in a potential accident, bystanders at Los Alamos National Laboratory could receive radiation doses as high as 1,795 rems, or nearly 72 times the federal guideline, LANL isn't obligated to change its safety procedures.

Two of Los Alamos National Laboratory's facilities could expose the public to high radiation doses in an accident scenario—and the lab won't commit to lowering that risk.

At a Nov. 17 meeting in Santa Fe, members of the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board chided LANL brass for failing to mitigate risks created by two of its facilities, the PF4 plutonium facility and the Area G material disposal area.

The DNFSB is an oversight board that advises LANL and other defense sites run by the National Nuclear Security Administration, a division of the US Department of Energy. One of its functions is to evaluate the risk of radiation exposure

presented by nuclear facilities to the public, to each site's workers and to the environment. The board compares each facility's risk to a federal guideline, which stipulates that the public should not be exposed to more than 25 rems of radiation in an acute incident.

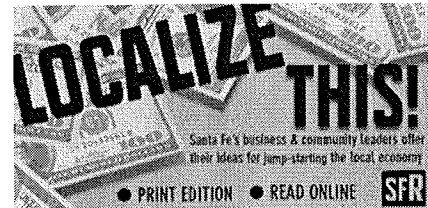
A rem is a unit of measurement of radiation dose that expresses the risk of adverse health effects caused by radioactivity. Materials used at LANL, including plutonium and uranium, give off radiation that can disrupt cell function and cause cancer or death.

The DNFSB estimates offsite radiation doses emitted by each facility under different hypothetical accident scenarios. The estimated doses that would be emitted by Area G, the lab's biggest radioactive material disposal area, are the most dramatic. In the hypothetical scenario of an airplane crashing into the domes at Area G, where radioactive waste is stored in metal drums and other containers, a person standing outside lab property could be exposed to a whopping 1,795 rems, usually from inhalation of radioactive particles.

That high dose is actually the estimated exposure to a person over a 50-year lifespan, Kim Kearfott, a professor of radiology at the University of Michigan, explains.

"The good news is this number is not as bad as it looks," Kearfott says. "The bad news is that person would be radioactive for a long time...the reality is, if you inhale plutonium, it's exposing you every year for the rest of your life."

In that hypothetical scenario, the exposed person would have about a 36 rem dose per year for 50 years, and



THIS WEEK'S SFR PICKS



Disturbing Art Lessons

In his new book, *Disturbing Art Lessons: A Memoir of Questionable Ideals and Equivocal Experiences*, Eli Levin uses his biography as an archetypal reference point to explore myths and truths about what it really means to be an artist. Through his own trials and tribulations, Levin exposes art school's disservice: leading students to believe that the world cares about artists.

Apr 13 4:30-6 pm

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a corresponding increased cancer risk. Each year, the exposed person's risk of cancer would increase by about 2 percent.

The 25 rem dose that the federal government recommends nuclear facilities not exceed presents a 1 percent increase in the exposed person's chance of getting cancer, Kearfott says. It's also the threshold above which an exposed person's blood will start to show changes, such as increased white blood cell count. By contrast, the maximum dose a nuclear facility worker should be exposed to over the course of a year is five rems.

"Twenty-five rems is a fairly high number," nuclear engineer John Till says. Till is the president of Risk Assessment Corporation, a private company that, like the DNFSB, estimates radiation exposure doses to the public caused by radioactive materials.

"It's higher than we allow people to get normally when they're working during the year," Till says. "On the other hand, it's set so that the likelihood of a health defect occurring from that exposure is fairly small."

LANL has more facilities that exceed the 25 rem guideline than any other NNSA site, DNFSB Chairman Peter Winokur said at the meeting. One facility at the Savannah River Site in South Carolina also exceeds radiation dose guidelines under some hypothetical accident scenarios.

But the guideline is only a recommendation, not an enforceable regulation. Last spring, US Energy Secretary Steven Chu rejected the DNFSB's recommendation to formalize the radiation dose guideline into a regulation. But the DNFSB itself has only an advisory role, and no regulatory power, as Board Member John Mansfield pointed out at the meeting.

LANL Director for Business and Operations Carl Beard said he felt the lab's operations are "safer now than they've ever been," adding that the safety goals of LANL and the DNFSB are "very well aligned, although we do discuss semantics and issues."

"You're your own regulator, so you're the ones determining when these facilities are safe to operate," Mansfield told LANL and NNSA representatives. "We're just trying to understand your interpretation of this nuclear safety management rule."

The high estimated radiation dose for Area G is partly due to the volume of radioactive material stored there: approximately 10.8 million cubic feet of waste. The plutonium facility, for its part, needs new ventilation and fire-suppression systems. But at the meeting, NNSA Defense Programs Deputy Administrator Don Cook said upgrading facilities to decrease possible radiation doses isn't the agency's only priority at LANL, adding, "I can't make a commitment to what Congress will appropriate."

While recognizing the limitations of the DNFSB's power over LANL, the board members expressed frustration with LANL's failure to comply with the 25-rem recommendation, as well as the lab's attitude toward the problem. Los Alamos Site Office Manager Kevin Smith touted LANL's improvement in some areas and staff members' track record of self-reporting safety breaches. LANL Director for Business and Operations Carl Beard said he felt the lab's operations are "safer now than they've ever been," adding that the safety goals of LANL and the DNFSB are "very well aligned, although we do discuss semantics and issues."

From some board members' reactions, it's clear they consider LANL's nuclear safety shortcomings to be a matter of more than just semantics. Mansfield said he wanted to make sure he correctly heard Beard's statement that the lab is safer now than ever, asking how Beard reconciled that assertion with documentation

- Meh
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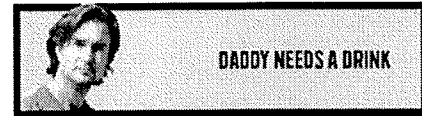
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of the lab's safety problems, the most egregious of which include lapses in hazard identification, staff compliance with safety procedures, and management "rationaliz[ing] the status quo rather than identifying root causes and fixes for the problems." But since the 25-rem limit isn't enforceable, LANL can sidestep such obvious contradictions between its own rosy portrayal of lab safety and documents pointing to profound problems, Los Alamos Study Group Executive Director Greg Mello says.

"Basically, NNSA wants to say something is safe or not just because they say," Mello says, indicating the lab's reluctance to commit to lowering the radiation dose to federally recommended levels. "That was the really shocking thing—the NNSA did not agree to protect the public and the workers to any standard whatsoever."



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Budget bill approved by House cuts spending for nuke lab, prohibits construction

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS * First Posted: December 16, 2011 - 4:44 pm

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — The compromise budget bill approved by the U.S. House Friday slashes funding for and prohibits any site preparation work on a controversial new \$6 billion nuclear facility at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

The spending bill appropriates \$200 million for the project this fiscal year, \$100 million less than the administration had requested. It also notes that "no construction activities are funded for the project this year," and calls for a new report on the country's capability for manufacturing so-called pits, or the cores that power nuclear weapons.

Watchdogs hailed the budget action as a sign Congress was backing its calls for the National Nuclear Security Administration to slow down on plans to build the facility.

"We are very pleased that Congress has substantially agreed with our analysis regarding the need to delay this project, and has also endorsed our call to re-examine alternatives for managing pit production," Greg Mello, head of the Los Alamos Study Group, said in a statement. His group has filed two lawsuits seeking to force NNSA to study alternatives to CMRR.

Lab officials say the proposed new lab — called the Chemistry Metallurgy Research Replacement Facility, or CMRR — is needed to replace a 1940s-era facility that is beyond renovation yet crucial to supporting its mission as the primary center for maintaining and developing the country's stockpile of nuclear weapons.

Although the facility has been in the planning stages for years, increased scrutiny has been placed on the lab in recent years as its price tag has shot up in response to what has been discovered to be a greater potential for a major earthquake along the fault lines that run under LANL.

Mello said the budget bill indicates "Congress is in no mood to pursue a risky 'design-build' process for a multibillion-dollar, one-of-a-kind plutonium facility in a high-seismicity location."

"That idea was nuts, and thankfully Congress appears to see that," he said.

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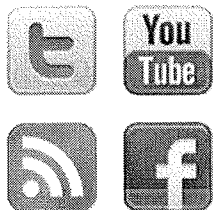
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The Year's End Brings Real Disarmament That You Can Touch and Feel

By Russ Wellen, December 21, 2011

"In crisis lies opportunity" is more than just a cliché (and we're not just talking about Naomi Klein's *Shock Doctrine*.) For instance, what could be a better time than the recess-depression in which we're mired to rethink the whole concept of a growth economy, which has become unsustainable in the face of climate change and dwindling resources? At the very least, it's a chance to trim our defense budget. In fact, it might not be foremost in the minds of most Americans, or even of much consolation, but cuts to our nuclear-weapons program constitute a silver lining to our economic crisis.

If you'll recall, earlier this year, the New START treaty was held hostage by Senate Republicans under the direction of Sen. Jon Kyl (R-AZ). By way of ransoming it, the Obama administration forked over a proposal to spend \$88 billion during the next decade on nuclear-weapon modernization. (As if to show the futility of that approach, while it was ultimately passed, Kyl still didn't vote in favor of New START.) That figure represents a 20 percent increase above funding levels proposed during the Bush administration.

Equally as sad, as Hans Kristensen wrote at the Federation of American Scientists' Strategic Security Blog:

... the treaty does not require destruction of a single nuclear warhead and actually permits the United States and Russia to deploy almost the same number of strategic warheads that were permitted by the 2002 Moscow Treaty [thanks, in part, to a] new counting rule that attributes one weapon to each bomber rather than the actual number of weapons assigned to them. [Even stranger, this] "fake" counting rule frees up a large pool of warhead spaces under the treaty limit that enable each country to deploy many more warheads than would otherwise be the case.

Indeed, the New START Treaty is not so much a nuclear *reductions* treaty as it is a *verification* and *confidence building* treaty.

Confidence building is nice and all. But it's been 62 years since both the United States and the former Soviet Union (and then Russia) have possessed nuclear weapons, 25 years since the pivotal Reykjavik nuclear summit, and 20 years since the end of the Cold War. We're still just trying to build confidence?

Meanwhile, what does disarmament look like when it's not just pecking at the inside of its egg struggling to emerge? Regular readers of Focal Points know that we track the progress of the Los Alamos Study Group, a disarmament

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organization that monitors the Los Alamos Nuclear Laboratory (the heart of the Manhattan Project during World War II) and is today managed by a Bechtel-led consortium for the National Nuclear Security Administration.

In recent years, the mission of the Los Alamos Study Group (LASG) has been to halt the progress of a Soviet-era-sounding project called the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Facility (CMRR), intended, in the words of the Los Alamos National Laboratory itself, to perform "analytical chemistry, materials characterization, and metallurgy research and development," for the production of nuclear pits.

Upon first hearing the phrase, a nuclear pit might sound like a dump for nuclear waste and old warheads. But, as in the pit of a fruit, it's an origin of life -- where the chain reaction occurs in a nuclear warhead. You can be forgiven if you're surprised that, in light of President Obama's renowned Prague disarmament speech and New START, however watered down, we're still creating these obscure objects of destruction. Especially considering that 14,000 pits have been recovered from warheads that have been retired.

Physicist and nuclear policy authority Frank von Hippel recently testified in a lawsuit that the LASG filed against the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA).

The need for large-scale pit production has vanished. In 2003, the [NNSA] was arguing that the [United States] needed the capability to produce 125 to 450 pits per year by 2020 to replace the pits in the US weapon stockpile that would be 30 to 40 years old by then. . . . But, in 2006, we learned that US pits were so well made that, according to a Congressionally-mandated review of ... pit aging, "Most primary types have credible minimum lifetimes in excess of 100 years."

Of course, that's as much bad news -- these infernal engines will be around for another century unless they're dismantled -- as good news. Meanwhile, the CMRR project is now expected to cost between \$4 and \$6 billion. In order to halt or at least stall it, the LASG filed a case against the NNSA seeking a new Environmental Impact Statement (as mandated by the National Environmental Policy Act) to address, among other things, seismic concerns about the project. While that case was dismissed, the LASG is not only appealing it, but filing a second lawsuit toward the same end. In the latest LASG newsletter, Executive Director Greg Mello writes (emphasis added):

On December 15, House and Senate conferees issued their "megabus" appropriations bill for fiscal year (FY) 2012. [Passed in the Senate and House, though 86 Republicans defied Republican leadership and voted against it. -- RW] ... the bill appropriates *only 63% of the requested funds* for the [CMRR], *slashing \$100 million (M) from the \$270 M proposed spending level* in the project. ... CMRR and [a project in proximity to it] were the only NNSA Weapons Activities construction projects cut. ... The proposed CMRR cut is 90% of the total proposed cut in new NNSA construction. NNSA's other proposed massive project, the Uranium Processing Facility (UPF), slated to be built at the Y-12 Nuclear Security Site in Tennessee, was not cut at all.

We have no wish to slight the forces arrayed against the Oak Ridge, Tennessee project. But we can't help but conclude that, along with current economic climate, the Los Alamos Study Group made the difference in slowing progress of the CMRR.

As Mello writes, the funding cut "can be fairly described as one of the few concrete policy accomplishments of the entire arms control and disarmament community in the United States over the past couple of years." Never mind your garden-party treaties that are guaranteed not to offend -- when the construction

of a facility designated for the manufacture of nuclear-weapons components is blocked, that's disarmament you can taste and feel.

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WEEKEND EDITION DECEMBER 23-25, 2011

Standing Up to Obama on the Environment

Ten Small Green Groups That Make a Big Difference

by JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

It's been a triumphant month for Big Oil. First, the Obama administration teamed with the Chinese delegation to scuttle the timid climate agenda at the Durban summit. Then recidivist offender British Petroleum won the rights to drill once again in the perilous depths of the Gulf of Mexico. And last week the Interior Department gave the green light for Shell to begin exploratory drilling in the pristine Chukchi Sea on Alaska's western coast.

These environmental body-blows elicited barely a murmur of protest from the green establishment and as the presidential election draws near even those faint critiques will fade away and inevitably be replaced by an REI-clad chorus singing Obama's praises as an ecologically enlightened chief executive. The crazed encomiums have already begun. Carl Pope, recently deposed from his twenty-year-long autocracy over the Sierra Club, ludicrously pronounced Obama the greatest environmental president in history.

Yet, when it comes to protection of the environment Obama's no Richard Nixon. Indeed, he's barely even George W. Bush. Let's look at revealing numbers from the national forests. During Bush's first three years in office, the Forest Service sold 4,792,702 MBF (thousand board feet) of timber logged from the national forests. During Obama's first three years in office, his team of chainsaw zealots nearly doubled Bush's frightful totals, selling 7,641,484 MBF. (See [Sold-Harvest Documents, 1905-2011, National Summary Graph](#), US Forest Service.) Even worse, Obama's Forest Service cloaks this grim enterprise under the dubious premise of "ecological forestry" and "biomass production." Recall that this high level of logging is occurring during an economic recession and prolonged slump in the housing market. If the economy ever picks up, Obama may even break the logging records set by Clinton after the Rider From Hell.

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Since 1989, the Los Alamos Study Group community has consistently provided leadership on nuclear disarmament and related issues in New Mexico. Their work includes research and scholarship education of decisionmakers, providing an information clearinghouse for journalists, organizing, litigating, and advertising. They place particular emphasis on the education and training of young activists and scholars. LASG's careful, reasoned approach developed many whistleblowers in the nuclear labs and plants. Since September 11, 2001, their work has increasingly placed nuclear weapons in the context of aggression abroad and the militarization of our society at home. One of LASG's most recent campaigns is the effort to end nuclear waste disposal in northern New Mexico. Official estimates place current annual waste generation and burial at Los Alamos at about 45,000 drums' worth per year, with increases planned if the University of California begins production of plutonium "pits," the cores of nuclear weapons. New pits are not needed for any existing weapons, but they are needed for some of the new weapons now being designed at Los Alamos, which include weapons specially-tailored for aiming at Third World countries.

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Albuquerque Journal (New Mexico)

Distributed by McClatchy-Tribune Business News

December 24, 2011 Saturday

New Plutonium Lab at LANL Delayed

BYLINE: John Fleck, Albuquerque Journal, N.M.

SECTION: STATE AND REGIONAL NEWS

LENGTH: 525 words

Dec. 24--The start of construction on a new plutonium laboratory at Los Alamos will be delayed at least a year because of a congressional decision to throttle back funding for the project and restrict how the money can be spent.

The congressional action also raises questions about the long-term prospects for the new Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility.

Lab and federal officials have been tight-lipped in the wake of the decision this month to allocate \$200 million for the project, rather than the \$300 million the administration requested for Fiscal Year 2012. Congress also restricted the funding, saying none of it could be used to start construction.

"No construction activities are funded for the CMRR Nuclear Facility during Fiscal Year 2012," the final congressional action said. The language was contained in a Dec. 15 final conference committee report outlining funding for the U.S. government for fiscal 2012, which began Oct. 1.

The money will allow Los Alamos to finish installing equipment in the project's already-built first phase, a lab and office building, a National Nuclear Security Administration spokesman said in a statement. The rest would apparently go to design work on the larger second phase, a laboratory for work with plutonium, a dangerously radioactive metal used in nuclear weapons, but construction on that second phase is prohibited.

"In the FY12 budget constrained environment, we are pleased the CMRR project ... will be able to remain on plan to finish equipping the Radiological Laboratory and Utility Office Building ahead of schedule, and substantially complete CMRR-NF design later this year," Josh McConaha said in a statement. "The conference agreement did delay the FY12 construction activities for the CMRR-NF, which will defer the first phases of construction for CMRR-NF."

Lab officials referred questions about the budget to NNSA, and McConaha did not respond to inquiries this week regarding details of the agency's plans for spending the \$200 million.

The nuclear facility, with an estimated price tag of \$3.7 billion to \$5.7 billion, has been plagued by delays and rising costs. Even before the congressional vote to delay construction, plans called for completion in 2023, more than a decade behind the original schedule when the project was launched.

Lab and federal documents suggest the construction to be deferred this year includes preliminary excavation work, the start of construction on a concrete plant for the massive structure and erection of the project's construction management trailers.

In all, the lab has issued at least 45 notices to potential bidders regarding possible contracting opportunities on the project, according to a review by Trish Williams-Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group, which opposes the project. In addition to construction-related opportunities, the announcements include plans for acquiring equipment for the building for things like

fire safety systems and guard facilities.

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Congress yanks cash away from New Mexico nuke lab

By AP | December 24, 2011

LOS ALAMOS, N.M. (AP) — It will be about a year before construction can start on a new plutonium laboratory at Los Alamos after Congress pulled back funding for the project and restricted how the money can be spent.

The Albuquerque Journal (<http://bit.ly/tar9WF>) reports the congressional action also raises questions about the long-term prospects for the new Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility.

The final congressional report said that no construction activities are funded for the CMRR-Nuclear Facility during Fiscal Year 2012.

Lab and federal documents suggest the construction to be deferred this year includes preliminary excavation work, the start of construction on a concrete plant for the massive structure and erection of the project's construction management trailers.

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In addition to construction-related opportunities, the announcements include plans for acquiring equipment for the building for fire safety systems and guard facilities.

While cutting from the administration's funding request for the nuclear facility, Congress gave full funding to a similar multibillion dollar project being built in Tennessee for work on uranium nuclear weapon parts.

That led some observers to speculate that Congress may be setting the stage for further delays in the Los Alamos plutonium lab because of concerns the agency cannot afford to work on both large projects simultaneously.

"Simultaneous construction of these projects is considered difficult to impossible by many in government," Greg Mello, of the Los Alamos Study Group, wrote in a letter to supporters this week. "Up to now at least, CMRR-NF has been the National Nuclear Security Administration's highest priority infrastructure project. Congress, authorizers and appropriators alike, and in both the House and Senate, evidently think differently, at least for the time being." The Los Alamos nuclear facility has been plagued by delays and rising costs. Even before the congressional vote to delay construction, plans called for completion in 2023, more than a decade behind the original schedule when the project was launched.

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