



# Los Alamos Study Group

*Nuclear Disarmament • Environmental Protection • Social Justice • Economic Sustainability*

## **Plutonium pit production and related issues in the New Mexico and national press**

**Print media only, November 1989 through December 2006**

**January 17, 2007**

Today's popular opposition to pit production in New Mexico is just the latest phase of an opposition that began in 1989. Opposition is certainly not confined to the immediate context of the National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA's) "Complex 2030" proposal. Public opposition to pit production at LANL has been vocal, consistent, and strong in New Mexico for 17 years so far. At the present, there is no publicly-expressed support for pit production at LANL whatsoever, even in Los Alamos.

Easily-accessed evidence of widespread popular opposition to pit production can be found at [www.lasg.org](http://www.lasg.org); see especially the *Call for Nuclear Disarmament* there.

For the most part this compilation includes only those articles which mention or otherwise involve the Los Alamos Study Group. The Study Group began formal operation in May 1992, and prior to this our media files are spotty. To compensate for this, this compilation includes a broader range of materials from 1989 to 1992. Opposition to warhead core ("pit") production at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) began in the fall of 1989, just a few months after pit production ceased at the Rocky Flats Plant.

This compilation does not include all the New Mexico press articles on this subject, although it includes most of them. National coverage is also incomplete. We have not included our own publications or any listing of radio and television programming (local, national, and foreign) on the subject of pit production at LANL.

# Bill funds Los Alamos

4/12/89

By PETER EICHSTAEDT  
The New Mexican Staff  
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Work could begin next year on a \$210 million plutonium-processing and weapons-research complex at Los Alamos National Laboratory that officials say is the largest construction project in the lab's history.

In late September, President Bush signed into law a bill that gave the lab \$44 million to begin construction of the Special Nuclear Materials Research and Development Laboratory. The law passed through Congress with no fanfare.

The lab already has received \$32 million over the past two years for development of the project. An additional \$134 million is expected over the next four years during construction, according to laboratory projections.

"The laboratory will be used for research on and development of actinide (radioactive) materials that are germane to the Laboratory's nuclear weapons program," according to a lab publication titled "Research Highlights, 1988."

"Much of the research in the complex will focus on developing methods for recovering plutonium contained in residue

and scrap materials," the publication stated.

The publication did not say if old nuclear warheads were included in the term "scrap materials." The lab historically has designed and developed the nation's nuclear warheads, although production occurs elsewhere.

"Design of the complex is expected to take approximately two years; construction is scheduled to begin during the winter of 1990," the publication stated.

The complex will consist of three buildings: a multi-story 91,000-square-foot main building, a 65,000-square-foot office

## plutonium plant

building and a 16,000-square-foot utility building.

Dave Jackson, a spokesman for the Department of Energy in Albuquerque, said an environmental impact statement will be required before construction on the project could begin.

The process of developing an environmental impact statement will require public comment, he said. But no schedule for public hearings was available.

Jackson said information on the project and the impact statement would be available in early December. Jackson did

not know if the impact statement would delay the project.

The project prompted a Santa Fe-area anti-nuclear group to question the direction of laboratory work and the handling of radioactive materials in the future.

"It raises real concerns of the direction the lab is going in terms of military research," said Richard Miller, director of Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety.

Funding for the new laboratory building is noted in the LANL five-year plan and is listed under "Weapons Research and

See Bill on Page A-2

## Bill funds plant for plutonium

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Development Activities."

The five-year plan also details a variety of other new construction projects proposed at the lab, but as yet unfunded.

One is called the Radioactive Liquid Waste Treatment Plant, which would cost \$100 million. The plant funding is not anticipated until 1992 and would continue until 1995.

Another item in the five-year plan was \$2.4 million this year for work at one of the lab's radioactive landfills called "Area P."

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is expected to sign a

## Plutonium plant concept grows

4/17/89

By PETER EICHSTAEDT  
The New Mexican Staff

Both the purpose and cost of a proposed plutonium research complex at Los Alamos National Laboratory have been expanded from the original proposal, a laboratory spokesman said Thursday.

Originally budgeted for \$210 million, the cost of the Special Nuclear Materials Research and Development Laboratory now is estimated at \$380 million, laboratory spokesman John Webster said.

In addition to weapons-related research with plutonium and "scrap metals," the new laboratory also will be used to pre-treat plutonium waste, he said.

Webster said the laboratory will handle only waste generated by Los Alamos laboratory,

not waste from other laboratories.

"There should be less waste," because of the pre-treatment program, he said. "The amount of waste should be reduced. It will be more efficient."

The research will include ways to process radioactive materials from old nuclear warheads, Webster said.

The radioactive contamination is not extensive, he said, but affects devices used to handle radioactive materials.

The new complex will be the biggest construction project ever undertaken by the laboratory, he said.

Ground-breaking originally was scheduled for late 1988, according to information on the project released in May 1988. But the project has been

delayed to give laboratory officials time to study the effects of the complex on the environment, Webster said.

Webster said the federal Department of Energy, the umbrella agency for the lab, will issue a "notice of intent" to prepare the impact statement in mid-December.

A public meeting to gather comments on the scope of the environmental study tentatively is set for mid-January in Los Alamos, he said.

Webster said the environmental impact statement must be approved by the Energy Department before any work other than design takes place.

Construction of the project now is scheduled to begin in September 1991, he said. It will take about four years to com-

plete, he said.

Congress already has allocated about \$32 million for the project, not all of which has been spent.

An additional \$44 million was included in a bill signed into law by President Bush in late September.

In May 1988, an \$11.9 million architectural and engineering design contract was awarded to Flour-Daniel of Irvine, Calif.

The design work was expected to take nine months but actually took more than a year to complete. It was finished recently.

Members of the state's congressional delegation said they have been aware of the project for two years and support spending federal money for it.

ABQ TRIB 11-27-89

# Los Alamos plans plutonium lab to replace old facility

By TONY DAVIS  
Staff reporter

Los Alamos National Laboratory is planning its most expensive construction project ever, a \$350 million to \$380 million plutonium research facility the lab says will be the finest of its kind in the world.

In the meantime, a 36-year-old building to be replaced by the new facility in the mid-1990s is a safety risk that is "at the end of its useful life," according to a U.S. Department of Energy document from Washington, D.C.

A Los Alamos spokesman this week said the old building presents "no health risk to any of the (300) employees or the general public."

Next month DOE will publish a notice of intent in the Federal Register to prepare an environmental impact statement for the new facility. It also will start accepting public comments on

what the environmental document should cover.

The old building, called the Chemical and Metallurgy Research Building, has "corroded and breached air-handling ducts, inadequate supply of filtered air, marginal building-wide filter systems and inadequate control systems," said a DOE budget request document submitted to Congress early this year.

"Many areas in the (old) building are radiologically contaminated and beyond economically viable cleanup," said the DOE document, which was seeking money for the new lab.

"Project completion (of the new building) will occur in (fiscal year) 1994 at the earliest — a time during which likelihood of serious accidents and litigation is increasing," the DOE document said.

An identical warning about the old building appeared in a DOE budget request for the new facility in 1988.

The new Special Nuclear Materials Research and Development Laboratory, like the old building, will be used to study how to recover plutonium from residue and scrap material. The new lab will be "the world's most advanced laboratory for plutonium research," Los Alamos officials said in a newsletter about the facility.

The new laboratory will have two to three buildings, totaling up to 170,000 square feet, compared to 550,000 square feet for the old building.

Construction could start by 1991, after completion of the environmental impact statement. The statement will outline how DOE believes the new project will affect the environment and what DOE will do to minimize the effects.

Los Alamos is a key DOE research facility, serving the department's weapons production complex across the United States and receiving money

from DOE's budget. The University of California at Berkeley operates Los Alamos for the department.

A Los Alamos spokesman said the concerns about the old building have been addressed.

"The concerns expressed by DOE in its documents reflect problems that have occurred and continuing concerns both by the DOE and the lab," said Los Alamos spokesman John Webster. "But things are upgraded and replaced before they present any health threat to the people who work there. We monitor that place carefully and there is no threat to anyone who is there."

An aide to Sen. Jeff Bingaman, however, said DOE officials are trying to have it both ways.

"They tell us in Congress it's a very severe situation, and it's going to cost hundreds of millions of dollars to replace it," said Ed McGaffigan, legislative director for the New Mexico

Democrat. "They also tell their own employees not to worry, we've got it under control."

McGaffigan said he's never visited the old building and can't say if it's safe or not. But if it is as bad as the DOE memo makes it sound, DOE should have started planning the new building sooner, he said.

"The problem is that for most of those years production of nuclear weapons took priority over the environment," McGaffigan said.

Plutonium is a key element in nuclear weapons design and production. It has been used in research at the lab since the World War II Manhattan Project to build the first atomic bombs. It can cause cancer if inhaled.

Congress has authorized the new lab's construction, but has appropriated only about \$75 million for it so far.

DOE's critics in Santa Fe have raised concerns about the new facility.

# DOE planning talks for plutonium facility

By CHARMIAN SCHALLER  
Monitor Staff Writer

The Department of Energy is planning a public "scoping meeting" late this month to gather comments on a planned new Los Alamos National Laboratory plutonium recovery facility.

The DOE notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement for the project appeared today in the Federal Register.

The public meeting will be held at 7 p.m., Jan. 31, in the Pajarito Room of Fuller Lodge in Los Alamos.

The new Special Nuclear Materials Research and Development Laboratory, a 193,000-square-foot complex, will take over

the plutonium handling functions of LANL's existing 37-year-old Chemical and Metallurgical Research building.

The new complex will be located at Technical Area 55. The location will make possible the consolidation of all LANL plutonium-handling operations in one area.

Calvin Martell, technical representative from CLS-1, the analytical group of the Chemistry and Laser Science Division, said, "They're going to be reprocessing plutonium — producing it from scrap."

The work at the new facility will involve recovery, not original production, of plutonium, he emphasized.

He said those working at the facility also will

be doing research and development. "They want to learn to do it better," he said. Information developed through work at the facility will be made available to other facilities including Rocky Flats.

Martell added that the new building, its location, and the work done there should make it possible to lessen plutonium impact on the environment.

The facility will be closer than CMR to sites where plutonium scrap is stored at LANL, he said.

In response to Monitor questions, Martell said that similar work now is done at PS4, which is near the planned site, and that at PS4, the "vast majority" of the plutonium recovery

work currently deals with "internal recycle" material — plutonium scrap stored at LANL.

Asked about the transportation of scrap plutonium to the proposed site of the new complex, Martell said the scrap will be multiply packaged in approved containers and moved in escorted trucks.

Martell said about half of the new complex will be devoted to analytical facilities where plutonium and its impurities will be analyzed.

Design of the complex is in progress and should be completed this year. Construction is expected to be completed in the fall of 1994.

One of the essential parts of the design of the new complex will be planning for specialized air filtration. High-efficiency particulate air fil-

ters (HEPA filters) will be used on incoming and outgoing air systems.

The total cost of the facility (through all of its phases) could be as much as \$380 million. The actual cost will depend on completion time. Thus far, the DOE has sought \$210 million for the project, and Congress has approved \$76 million in funding for the first three years of the project (through 1990).

The public meeting and written statements will be used in identifying issues that should be covered in a subsequent draft environmental impact statement on construction of the building, according to the DOE notice. Once a draft

(Please see PLUTONIUM, Page 6)

6 Friday, January 12, 1990

Los Alamos Monitor

## Plutonium (from Page 1)

EIS is completed, there will be further opportunities for public comment.

The notice published in the Federal Register said that issues identified so far for coverage in the environmental impact statement include: public and occupational safety ("The radiological and nonradiological impacts of routine operations and potential accidents including projected effects on workers and the public will be addressed in accordance with DOE policy."); regulatory compliance; air quality ("The effects of radioactive and nonradioactive air emissions."); waste management ("The environmental effects of the generation, treatment, transport, storage, and disposal of radioactive,

hazardous and solid wastes and mixtures of the foregoing."); packaging and transportation of radioactive materials ("... on LANL site roads that are open to the public."); decommissioning and decontamination at the end of the new facility's operating lifetime; potential impact on historical, archaeological, scientific or culturally important sites; impact on threatened or endangered species; and any cumulative effects.

The announcement said that background information on DOE operations at LANL is contained in the "Final Environmental Impact Statement — Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory Site," a 1979 DOE document that is available at a number of libraries, among them Mesa Public Library in Los Alamos, the New Mexico State Library in Santa Fe, and the J. Robert Oppenheimer Study Center at LANL.

Martell provided several interesting asides

on the project:

- He noted that perhaps the most significant historical item on the site, a log cabin from Los Alamos County's homesteading days, was moved many months ago to a new site adjacent to Fuller Lodge and the Los Alamos Historical Museum.

- And, he said, there are plans to decontaminate CMR and reuse its 550,000 square feet — primarily as chemical laboratory space, unifying LANL's scattered chem lab areas.

He said investigation is now in progress to determine the impact over the years of radioactive work on the duct work, plumbing, and other portions of CMR. When the investigation is completed, he said, the necessary material will be removed, and new equipment will be installed.

- The CMR is safe, he said.

(Although the DOE's funding request told Congress that, "Corroded and breached air handling ducts, inadequate supply of filtered air, marginal buildingwide filter systems and inadequate control systems contribute to serious situations developing....")

But, he said, the cost of doing the ongoing repairs to keep the aging building safe are growing rapidly. The laboratory is saying, Martell said, "Let's build a new one before we have trouble."

Those wishing to comment by mail should send letters postmarked by March 1 to: Donald Lucero, U.S. Department of Energy, Albuquerque Operations Office, P.O. Box 5400, Albuquerque, N.M., 87115, telephone 665-2170. Requests for copies of the draft EIS, once it is developed, should be directed to the same man.

Questions about further information on the EIS process should be directed to: Carol M. Borgstrom, director, Office of NEPA Project Assistance (E11-25), U.S. Department of Energy, 1000 Independence Ave. SW, Washington, D.C., 20585, telephone 202-586-4600.

According to the Federal Register notice, "Individuals desiring to comment orally at this meeting (on Jan. 31 in Los Alamos) should notify Mr. Lucero ... as soon as possible so that the department can arrange a schedule of presentations. Persons who have not submitted a request to speak in advance may register to do so at the meeting. The meeting will not be conducted as an evidentiary hearing, and there will be no questioning of speakers."

So that everyone will have an opportunity to speak, the notice said, speakers will be limited to five minutes each.





# CCNS

*Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety*

Jan. 22, 1990  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Press Contact: Daniel Gibson  
988-9210 or 986-1973

## CCNS PREPARES FOR UPCOMING SCOPING HEARINGS REGARDING LANL SPECIAL NUCLEAR MATERIALS RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT FACILITY

Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety is busy preparing for the upcoming "scoping hearings" regarding Los Alamos National Laboratory's proposed Special Nuclear Materials Research & Development facility.

The scoping hearings will be held at 7 p.m., Jan. 31 at the Fuller Lodge in Los Alamos; and at 7 p.m., Feb. 13 at Northern N.M. Community College in Espanola.

The hearings will provide the public with a forum to suggest what LANL should include in the Environmental Impact Statement the laboratory is required by law to produce for this proposed facility. The facility will be the single largest construction project in the lab's history, with a price tag near \$400 million. It will be used for research on plutonium and other fissionable products, and recovery of plutonium from obsolete weapons and weapons-related scrap.

"We are apprehensive about this proposed facility and we plan to convey our misgivings to LANL at the hearings," says CCNS consultant Greg Mello.

"We question if this is a wise use of our nation's resources in light of decreasing tension in international relationships. Enhanced production of plutonium for use in nuclear weapons is very questionable when you consider we already have over 20,000 nuclear warheads. The facility will provide some new short-lived jobs, but it's not clear if this project will really help our local economy; in fact, it may hurt it. What will be its impact on tourism, especially if there is an accident involving plutonium, one of the most toxic, long-lived substances there is? Is this the kind of economic development we want in northern New Mexico? We feel the talent and creativity of LANL staff would better be used addressing pressing environmental and social problems rather than production of new devices of war."

(over)

# LOS ALAMOS NATIONAL LAB'S PROPOSED PLUTONIUM RESEARCH & PRODUCTION BUILDING

In 1988, Congress quietly granted Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) \$10 million to begin design work on the largest construction project in its history, the proposed Special Nuclear Materials Research and Development (SNMR&D) building. This building is intended for plutonium research and production. This giant complex will have a floor space equivalent to the area of over five football fields. The "special nuclear materials" which the lab will be handling are primarily plutonium and the fissionable isotopes of uranium. In 1989, an additional \$22 million was given to the lab to continue design work. If the funding continues LANL expects to begin construction in 1991, with a price tag of nearly \$400 million.

The proposed complex would house the world's most advanced facilities for plutonium research and also assist LANL's current plutonium production and recycling center at Tech Area 55. The SNMR&D building is intended to replace portions of the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Building, parts of which have become unsafe and too contaminated to economically clean up.

In 1981, LANL was producing over a ton of plutonium a year and since 1984 has taken over varying amounts of production work from the Hanford complex in Washington state and the Rocky Flats Plant in Colorado. There is now mounting pressure for LANL to take over the reprocessing work of Rocky Flats. Since LANL has no outside agency that limits the amount of nuclear waste it can store or bury, a proposal to shift waste-producing production activities to LANL is highly probable. A recent report from the National Research Council said:

"...the Plutonium Facility (Building TA-55) at LANL is an efficient and productive operation for scrap recovery. This facility, operating for the most part on a one-shift, 5-day schedule, can process almost half as much plutonium as Rocky Flats can (even if Building 371 were to be renovated) and turn out a purer product. If additional capacity is desired, institution of a three- or four-shift operation at the LANL facility should be more than adequate to handle the complex's plutonium recycling needs...Although there may be resistance at LANL to converting Building TA-55 into a full-scale production facility, an administrative solution should be possible."<sup>1</sup>

Moving production would relieve Rocky Flats of limited waste storage problems by transporting pre-waste raw materials (plutonium contaminated scrap and old nuclear bombs) to LANL instead, thus producing nuclear waste here rather than at one of DOE's troubled facilities currently under scrutiny.

The capabilities and purposes of the new facility support an expanded plutonium processing role for LANL. As stated in LANL's January, 1990 Fact Sheet:

"...research and development [in this building] consists, generally, of developing and verifying advanced chemical procedures for the recovery and purification of special nuclear materials and associated waste minimization. The systems and equipment necessary to implement the new or improved processes are then demonstrated so that the technology may be incorporated at other Department of Energy facilities."

Whether or not the "new or improved processes" that LANL develops would ever be moved to another facility is a matter of speculation.

Though funding for this building is derived from LANL's nuclear weapons budget, the building could play a significant role in the development of civilian nuclear reactors and exotic fuel technologies. There still is no safe means for the permanent disposal of radioactive wastes. The proposed research into plutonium-related technology raises many serious health and safety questions regarding what to do with the wastes generated and the transportation of raw radioactive materials to and from the facility.

"The nation is awash in plutonium."<sup>2</sup> The SNMR&D building will produce even more surplus plutonium and its highly toxic and long lived waste byproducts. The wisdom of proceeding with this project is questionable given the risks to both the public and the environment. CCNS feels that the millions of dollars earmarked for this endeavor would be better spent in the research and development of safe alternatives and new technologies to clean up the millions of tons of radioactive waste already contaminating the environment across the U.S.; it is these wastes which pose the greatest and most immediate threat to public health and safety.

<sup>1</sup> THE NUCLEAR WEAPONS COMPLEX: Management for Health, Safety, and the Environment, National Academy Press, Washington D.C. 12/89, p. 84

<sup>2</sup> John Herrington, former Secretary of the U.S. Department of Energy, before a congressional committee in 1988.

# Advisory Committee on Nuclear Facility Safety

to the

United States Department of Energy  
1000 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20585

November 6, 1990

The Honorable James D. Watkins  
Secretary of Energy  
U.S. Department of Energy  
1000 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20585

Dear Admiral Watkins:

Your Advisory Committee on Nuclear Facility Safety met in Los Alamos, New Mexico, on September 24 and 25, to review specific safety issues at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). The Committee toured selected facilities at the laboratory, heard technical presentations from representatives of the laboratory staff, and received comments from the public. We recognize that a brief visit is not much more than an audit. However, based on this meeting, we have the following observations and recommendations.

LANL appears to be well managed and the employees we encountered seemed to be both well-trained and enthusiastic about the work they were doing and satisfied with the working environment and resources they were provided. From the limited sample the Committee saw, the research and development program at LANL impressed us as being well planned and well conducted.

We were also pleased by the extent to which LANL management has recognized the importance of, and is working to implement fully, two fundamental safety principles which you have espoused: the need for line managers to take active responsibility for the safety of the employees and facilities under their control and the need to instill an awareness by employees at every level of the importance of safety as a primary parameter in all of their activities. We did find instances, particularly at the research/waste management interface, which made it clear that there is still work to be done. However, we believe that LANL management will be successful in developing the new safety culture.

During the public comment session, some persons expressed concern that environmental monitoring results are not becoming available to the public until many months after they are completed. In one case, this delay was two years. Apparently, most of the delay arises from the approval process for these reports by headquarters offices and is a generic problem affecting the release of environmental monitoring information at other sites as well. We believe that it is important for the general public and those most directly exposed to have timely access to this environmental monitoring information concerning routine or accidental releases of

radiologic or toxic materials. Therefore, we recommend that ways be sought to speed up the release of monitoring reports, such as has been done at the Rocky Flats Plant. One possibility is to delegate approval authority to either the Albuquerque Operations Office (ALO) or LANL.

Finally, the Committee believes that the plutonium processing capabilities and expertise it saw at TA-55 are a significant but under-utilized asset to DOE. Much of the equipment and many of the procedures used there are state-of-the-art and represent substantial improvements over equipment and procedures in use elsewhere in the DOE complex. For example, the Committee was especially pleased to see that the technology used for the glove boxes at LANL was much more advanced than that at the Rocky Flats Plant, and that careful attention was being devoted to prevention of contamination of duct work. We recommend that serious consideration be given to how the capabilities at TA-55 could be used to provide broader benefits to the complex.

I would be glad to discuss any of these issues further.

Sincerely,

*John F. Ahearne*

*for* John F. Ahearne  
*work* Chairman

# Committee says LANL should use plutonium capabilities

By BOB QUICK  
The New Mexican Staff

An advisory committee says Los Alamos National Laboratory's plutonium processing capability is under-used — but that doesn't mean the lab will expand its handling of the radioactive material, a spokesman said Wednesday.

"I do think it is very clear that we are a research and development facility," said Eugene Werka, association director for Chemistry and Materials at the Laboratory. "We are not a (plutonium) production

facility nor is it our intent to do production."

Werka was responding to a Nov. 6 letter, made public this week, from the Advisory Committee on Nuclear Facility Safety to Energy Secretary James D. Watkins.

The committee, which consisted of 16 experts in various areas of nuclear energy, visited Los Alamos in late September to inspect the laboratory and to hold public meetings.

In the letter to Watkins, the committee said the laboratory "ap-

pears to be well managed, and the employees we encountered seemed to be both well-trained and enthusiastic about the work they were doing and satisfied with the working environment and resources they were provided.

"From the limited sample the committee saw, the research and development program at LANL impressed us as being well-planned and well-conducted."

The committee had special words of approval for the lab's plutonium

processing facility, Technical Area-55.

"Much of the equipment and many of the procedures used there are state-of-the-art and represent substantial improvements over equipment and procedures in use elsewhere in the DOE complex," the letter said. "The plutonium processing capabilities and expertise . . . at TA-55 are a significant but under-utilized asset to DOE."

"We certainly were very pleased with the committee's comments," Werka said. "We take very seriously

our responsibility to the public and the nation that plutonium processing here is done in a safe, secure and environmentally benign manner."

Werka said the laboratory was the Energy Department's "lead laboratory in developing advanced plutonium processing technologies."

Werka said he was not able to interpret exactly what the committee meant in its letter with a comment that, "Serious consideration (should) be given to how the capabilities at TA-55 could be used

to provide broader benefits to the complex."

He said Watkins has appointed a committee to study what the Energy Department needs to do with plutonium processing. "We are working with Rocky Flats (plutonium processing plant in Colorado) to help it get up and running again."

Rocky Flats last January stopped shipments of the plutonium components used as the triggers of thermonuclear bombs. It is the only plant in the country that makes such triggers.

# LOS ALAMOS Monitor

Vol. 28, No. 63

Friday, March 29, 1991

## Lab: CMR facility safe, but SNM lab needed

By CHARMIAN SCHALLER  
Monitor Staff Writer

There's a certain irony in the position of people proposing construction of a new Special Nuclear Materials Laboratory.

When they point out the age and potential deficiencies of the Chemical and Metallurgical Research facility, the current site for work that would be transferred to the SNM, there is an outcry of concern from people — especially people in Santa Fe and Taos — who are worried about exposure to radioactivity.

(The phrase "special nuclear materials" has a very precise meaning. There are five such materials: enriched uranium; plutonium 242; plutonium 239 and 241; uranium 233; and plutonium 238.)

But if lab spokesmen downplay the problems at CMR, they are less likely to convince Congress to provide the funding for the new state-of-the-art building.

Some of the same people who frequently express concerns about radiological safety have, at several public hearings, raised concerns that Los Alamos National Laboratory would use the proposed SNM for production of rather than research on plutonium. Essentially, they say, they fear that Rocky Flats' production work would be transferred to LANL.

The National Research Council once suggested such a possibility.

But Monitor files show that a series of questions posed in 1989 and 1990 to people including LANL Director Sig Hecker and Energy Secretary James Watkins all drew the same response:

### News analysis

There is no intent to use the SNM for production of plutonium. LANL's plutonium focus is research.

#### 'RELIABILITY' IS THE ISSUE

In a recent interview with John R. Phillips, group leader of CLS-1, the Analytical Group in the Chemical and Laser Sciences Division (which occupies nearly half of the CMR), and Ronald G. Stafford, deputy division leader for radiation protection in the Health, Safety and Environment Division, it was apparent that both men were aware of all of these ironies.

Both strongly support construction of the SNM.

Stafford commented, "I was convinced that that project would be a sellable project" because a state-of-the-art facility would be replacing a building now almost 40 years old.

But both also emphasized that CMR is safe. Maintenance, they said, has always been done and is now an even more important focus of attention.

The issue, they said, is not one of safety in this aging building, but of "reliability."

Were safety concerns to arise, they said, CMR would be shut down immediately.

Safety comes first and is assured, they said. But if a shutdown were necessary, it would bring plutonium operations at Los Alamos National Laboratory to their knees.

The lab's fiscal 1991-92 field budget request

# LANL

## AND THE ENVIRONMENT

prepared for Congress, provided at the request of the Monitor by Leon Kantola, project controls manager for the SNM, put it this way:

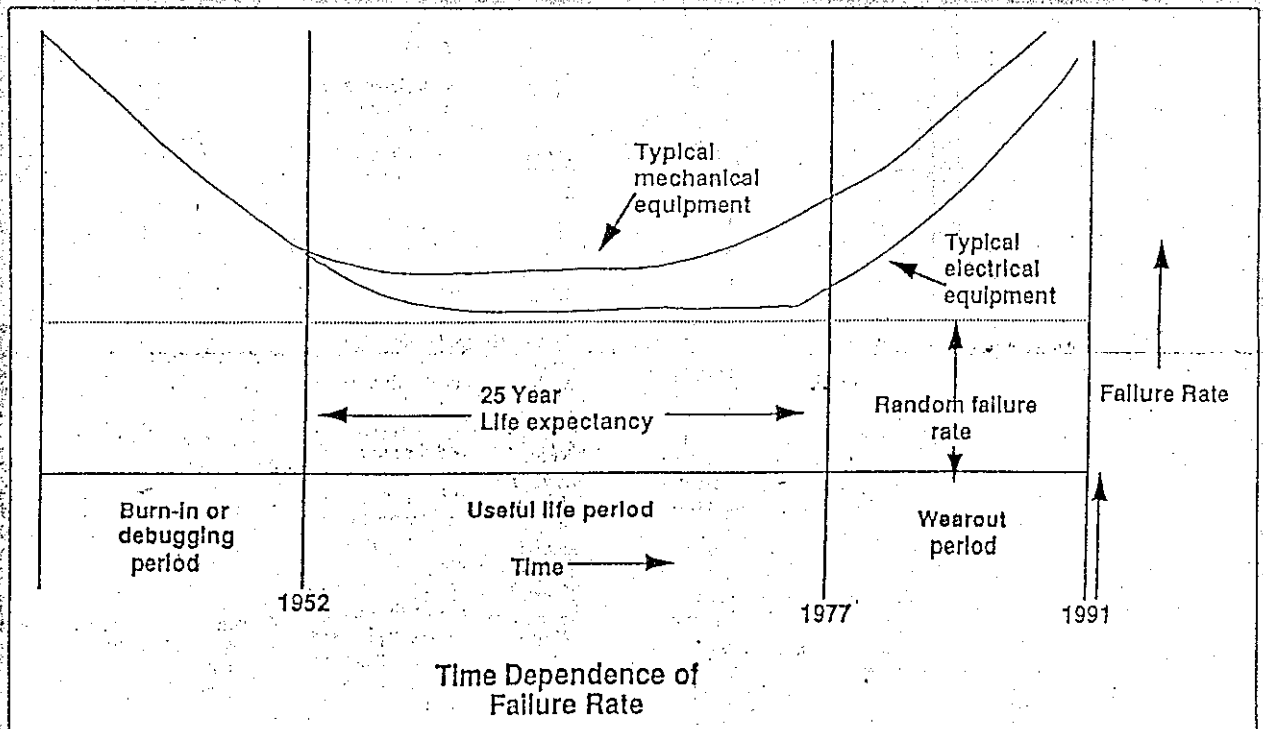
"Evaluation of existing conditions and recent maintenance and repair experience in the CMR Building have led to the proposal to replace the facility. Over the past 38 years, the utilities, gloveboxes, and hoods have deteriorated to some extent so that the potential for program interruption because of equipment breakdown or maintenance has become a major concern.

"Maintenance costs will increase with time.

"Despite a program of continuing upgrade of equipment and facilities, the age of the CMR Building and current awareness of new initiatives in the areas of health, safety, and environment have led laboratory management to the decision that a major upgrade or replacement of the facility is necessary and should be undertaken to reduce the risk of system or equipment failures that could result in programmatic interruptions.

"Any significant disruption of the analytical chemistry activities in the CMR Building would

(Please see CMR, Page 10)



effectively bring all plutonium facility operations at Los Alamos to a halt....

"There are no other laboratories at Los Alamos that are either available or suitable for the SNM research and development work now conducted in the CMR Building. Analytical chemistry capabilities for SNM exist at Rocky Flats, Savannah River, New Brunswick Laboratory, and Hanford. However, none of these facilities can be considered as a viable alternative for the various analyses that are now performed at the CMR building and that are required for the support of the Plutonium Processing Facility work."

The budget request said:

"Our analytical laboratories have certain unique capabilities: better reliability, lower limits of detection, and the ability to develop techniques for determining unusual impurities.

"Transfer of functions to those facilities would have other severe negative programmatic impacts. A most important programmatic consideration is the short turnaround time for required results for experimenters and production personnel.

"Present schedules could not be maintained with off-site shipment for analysis. If samples were to be shipped elsewhere, there would also be a severe packaging problem; metallic plutonium and alloys react with water and other atmospheric gases, and such reactions could destroy the integrity of the samples and therefore invalidate the analysis. For the above reasons, only options at Los Alamos have been developed."

#### FUNDING FOR SNM AND CMR

The proposed SNM is in limbo, right now. Congress appropriated no funds for SNM in fiscal 1991, although it had provided \$44 million for fiscal 1990 and a total of \$32 million for the project in years before that.

Stafford said there is hope that continued design of the SNM will be funded again in fiscal 1995.

But even if the project eventually moves ahead, it will be 5-10 years before the building is done.

In the meantime, some \$7 million — including the unspent portion of the \$44 million and certain environmental safety and health money — is being spent for refurbishment of the

ly planned for the SNM.

The invention was a "sliding sash" developed by David Carlson, Bob Comer, Joel Dahlby, Brad Gallimore, Calvin Martell, and Walter Stone — and submitted for patent.

The "sash" is essentially a screen that blocks most of an open-front box used in lab chemistry. The sash leaves only the minimal opening needed for work in progress. It can be shifted from side to side to expose different areas.

Stafford said the use of the sash "reduces the air demand by a factor of two to three." A lab NewsBulletin article in April 1990 said, in addition, "Lab tests over a 16-month period concluded that the new box increases retention of particles within the box by a factor of 10, thus greatly decreasing the possibility of contamination outside the box."

These sliding sashes now have been installed in a number of places in CMR.

Is air flow adequate today?

Phillips said, "Yes."

Stafford said, "It was getting close," but the measures taken solved the problem.

• Phillips said the building has some 400 glove boxes and they do deteriorate. But, he said, "We probably replace 10 to 15 boxes per year" with new "state of the art boxes with special coatings."

• The building itself?

The building has seven "wings" — 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 9.

Stafford said three wings — 2, 5 and 7 where most of the plutonium operations take place — were upgraded in 1977.

After upgrading, Stafford said, these wings had two stages of high-efficiency particulate air filters (HEPA) filters in place. They are tested regularly, he said.

Wings 3 and 4 have a different type of filters, Stafford said, and LANL is "looking at upgrading both of those systems in the next couple of years."

He said wing 3's upgrade — with \$3 million in new filters — could come in fiscal year 1992-93. The schedule for wing 4 is uncertain. If the SNM is built, he said, wing 4 could be refurbished for uses not involving radioactive materials and not requiring HEPA filters.

Wing 9 is a more recent part of the building, and it has HEPA filters. Wing 1 is an administrative wing.

and Environment Division.

HSE moved promptly to contact the others and check their homes, cars and associates.

Asked if subsequent investigation showed any hazard to the people who left the building or to their associates, Stafford said, "No. Not to the people who left or the people they came in contact with ... There weren't any detected health effects to any of the employees...."

• In 1982, an incident occurred that involved one person who allegedly took materials from a laboratory and contaminated his own locker, subsequently contending that others had been responsible.

Stafford said, "We decontaminated him that day." No one's health was adversely affected, Stafford said.

The man is no longer with the laboratory.

Phillips said, "He was not following established procedures."

The Monitor asked why CMR uses a self-monitoring approach, susceptible to certain human failings, rather than employing staff members assigned to monitor everyone who leaves the building.

Phillips said, "Wherever you work, you have to hire good people; you have to train them, and you have to trust them."

Training, he said, is emphasized.

Stafford pointed to the portals as some protection.

Both said that self-monitoring is the standard procedure at virtually all lab sites. It would be more expensive than risk-benefit analysis supports to hire special people, they said.

"We handle very small quantities" of radioactive material, Phillips added. "We're not a plutonium-producing facility ... Our (thermo-luminescent dosimeter averaged) exposures are extremely low."

Stafford said, for example, that of 89 CLS-1 people in CMR who wore TLDs in 1990, 77 had zero exposures. The highest exposure of the remaining employees was 0.41 rem per year, he said, "one-twelfth of the permissible yearly accumulation."

Neither Phillips nor Stafford sees CMR as a hazard to employees or the public.

There never has been any intention to shut down CMR, the latest SNM budget indicates that approximately \$293.6 million of the \$385 million would go for SNM, and \$91.4 million would go for CMR decontamination and refurbishment. The redone building would be used for a variety of purposes including chemical laboratories.

#### THOSE DEFICIENCIES...

Meanwhile, the wording of a DOE SNM request to Congress several years ago continues to haunt LANL spokesmen. Monitor news files show that the narrative portion of that request warned that, "Corroded and breached air handling ducts, inadequate supply of filtered air, marginal building-wide filter systems, and inadequate control systems contribute to serious situations developing in the CMR building. A system failure would adversely affect safety of personnel and require shutting down the facility."

The Monitor explored those concerns with Phillips and Stafford.

Phillips said, "The building was very well designed ... in the 1950s."

• Stafford said air flow in each wing of the building is approximately 100,000 cubic feet per minute. Overall, he said, more than 500,000 cubic feet per minute of air is being moved.

Air comes into the offices and laboratories in the building and is sucked into glove boxes (which maintain negative pressure) and then into a system of ducts and on to the basement.

There has been "some deposition" of acid in the duct system over the years, Phillips said, but water is sprayed into the system two to five minutes per day to wash it down. The rinse water flows to the liquid waste treatment facility.

• Corrosion from acid fumes was found in a "couple of places in wings 5 and 3 at joints," Phillips said. Stafford said that the stainless steel ducts were noticeably roughened and had been sealed with a thick paint.

But, Phillips said, "We went back and did ultrasonic testing," measuring the thickness of the metal, and found that, "The ducts had not been breached."

• Stafford said, "Over many years, they put in a number of open-faced hoods." The velocity of air over the opening of a hood must be 125 lineal feet per minute, he said. "As we put in more hoods ... we had to have more air supply..."

As a result, two actions were taken. Phillips said some laboratories were shifted, and CMR made use of an innovative development original-

## UPGRADE PLANS

And the current upgrading?

Stafford said that among the projects scheduled for completion in fiscal 1991 are installation of a new stack-monitoring system, and checking of all spray nozzles in the duct wash-down system.

There are 15 items on the full upgrade list, which could stretch as far into the future as 1996.

Asked if he is afraid to work in the building, Phillips said, "No. It's a good building. It's well designed. It's well constructed." In fact, he said, he is familiar with analytical chemistry facilities at a number of DOE sites, and he is convinced that this is one of the best. "It has been maintained well, and we're increasing maintenance," he said.

He noted that the building has passed the point on its "useful life" curve when maintenance must be "proactive" or the quality of the building will drop rapidly. But, he indicated, that proactive approach is being taken.

#### PERSONNEL MONITORING

And the people in the building?

Phillips and Stafford outlined a self-monitoring system that requires people who work in the laboratories in the interior of the building to monitor themselves four times before they emerge into common areas.

Those who simply enter the laboratory area must conduct three self-monitoring operations before leaving.

All protective clothing — smocks, booties, etc., — remain within the controlled area.

In addition, two portals exist that were installed to safeguard the facility from the removal of radioactive materials.

Although the portals weren't designed for personal safety, Phillips said they are sufficiently sensitive that they will detect for several days the lingering radiation in a person who has had a thallium 208 procedure on his heart and circulatory system or an iodine test on his thyroid.

When the portals detect radioactivity, an alarm sounds.

#### TWO INCIDENTS...

Two incidents have occurred at CMR that raised concerns about self-monitoring.

• In 1981, a radioactive sample came into the CMR mislabeled "uncontaminated."

Several people left the building after handling the sample. Phillips said those who left without detecting radioactivity "did not adequately monitor themselves."

But one person did a thorough job, detected radiation and reported immediately to the Health, Safety



# Lab Made Plutonium For Arms

## Los Alamos Radiation Over Current Standard

By John Fleck

JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

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Los Alamos National Laboratory processed large amounts of plutonium in the early 1980s to help meet a surge in U.S. nuclear warhead production, according to recently declassified congressional testimony by Director Sig Hecker.

The work, turning impure plutonium and plutonium scraps into weapons-quality material, exposed laboratory workers to radiation levels that would be unacceptable under current standards, Hecker said at a closed House committee hearing in 1990.

In the process, some of the laboratory's plutonium equipment was used so much it has worn out, according to Los Alamos budget documents made public this week by Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety, a Santa Fe-based environmental group.

The documents shed new light on the tightly held secrets of Technical Area 55, the top-security Los Alamos compound where the lab's plutonium work is done. The laboratory has long acknowledged it has produced quantities of plutonium as a byproduct of research that then were turned over to the Department of Energy for use in nuclear weapons.

Hecker's testimony is the first public acknowledgment that such research has involved "full-scale processing of plutonium."

The amount of plutonium that can be processed at the laboratory is secret, but spokesman Bill Heimbach said it is smaller than the capabilities of Rocky Flats, the Colorado factory that processes the plutonium and builds the plutonium parts for U.S. nuclear weapons.

The laboratory inadvertently revealed in a 1981 annual report that it had processed more than 3,000 pounds of plutonium the year before — enough for about 250 bombs the size of that dropped on Nagasaki

MORE: See LAB on PAGE A3

# Lab Made Plutonium for Arms

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

in World War II.

According to Hecker, the Technical Area 55 plutonium laboratory, completed in the late 1970s, originally was to be used strictly for research.

But Los Alamos wanted to do large-scale research so the lab could develop safer and more efficient plutonium processing techniques, which could then be used at Rocky Flats, where large quantities of plutonium are handled.

That required a laboratory designed "with the capability in mind to do full-scale plutonium processing," Hecker said.

Then, when the Department of Energy faced a plutonium processing crunch in the early 1980s, Los Alamos "sprinted into the breach to help out," Hecker said.

At the time, the United States was building new warheads at a rapid rate, according to Robert S. Norris, a nuclear weapons expert with the Natural Resources Defense Council, a Washington, D.C. environmental group.

"The order book was very full," Norris said.

The result, according to Hecker, was that the Los Alamos plutonium laboratory was operated beyond the

levels that would be permitted by today's stricter DOE safety standards.

"There were a number of things that were done from an operational standpoint that, in today's environment, no longer are acceptable from the standpoint of ... radiation exposures," he told House members.

Hecker did not say how many workers were exposed or if their health was affected. Plutonium in extremely small quantities can cause cancer.

The work also took its toll on the laboratory.

According to the budget documents, the plutonium laboratory "has been used for production, for which it was not designed. One-fourth of its area is worn out and will need to be replaced." The laboratory is still in use, but Los Alamos is asking the DOE for money to replace it.

With Rocky Flats shut because of health and safety problems and nuclear weapons production currently on hold, large-scale plutonium production is not going on anywhere in the country.

But the problems plaguing attempts to restart Rocky Flats and the reduced demand for plutonium resulting from the rapidly shrinking U.S. nuclear arsenal have led to speculation Los Alamos's laboratory could be sufficient to replace Rocky Flats.

Officials at the DOE and Los Alamos say they have no such plan.

ALB. J. 74. 1/18/92

# LANL head can't recall testimony

The Associated Press

LOS ALAMOS — The director of Los Alamos National Laboratory says he doesn't recall testifying that workers were exposed to levels of radiation now considered unsafe when the lab processed large amounts of plutonium a decade ago.

*The Albuquerque Journal* in a copyright story said the lab's involvement in nuclear warhead production in the early 1980s was revealed by director Sig Hecker in testimony to a closed House committee hearing in 1990.

The work involved turning impure plutonium and plutonium scraps into weapons-quality material. As a result, lab workers were exposed to radiation levels that would be unacceptable under current standards, Hecker said at the 1990 congressional hearing.

"There were a number of things that were done from an operational standpoint that, in today's environment, no longer are acceptable from the standpoint of ... radiation exposure," Hecker told House members.

*The Albuquerque Journal* said Hecker did not state how many workers were exposed or if their health was affected.

Plutonium in extremely small quantities can cause cancer.

But Hecker said Saturday he didn't recall the House testimony. He said he testifies before Congress six or seven times a year in both closed and open forums.

"To my knowledge, I know of no workers' exposure beyond that (federal radiation exposure limit of 5 rems per year)," Hecker said. A rem is a unit that measures radiation exposure to the entire body.

"We ourselves have implemented a stricter standard for our workers," he said.

Hecker said the lab has, since the 1980s, reduced the amount to which a worker can be exposed to 2 rems per year.

"In addition, we have introduced a number of measures in the processing to keep exposure levels ALARA (as low as reasonably achievable) standards," he said.

Hecker's 1990 testimony, the newspaper reported, is the first public acknowledgement that such research has involved "full-scale processing of plutonium."

The lab "sprinted into the breach to help out," when the Department of Energy faced a plutonium processing crunch in the early 1980s, Hecker testified.

At the time, the U.S. was

building new warheads at a rapid rate, according to Robert S. Norris, a nuclear weapons expert with the Natural Resources Defense Council, a Washington, D.C. environmental group.

"The order book was very full," Norris said.

The work, according to Los Alamos budget documents made public this week by Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety, a Santa Fe-based environmental group, wore out some of the laboratory's plutonium equipment.

According to the documents, the plutonium laboratory "has been used for production for which it was not designed. One-fourth of its area is worn out and will need to be replaced."

Alb. J. n. C. 44492 7/4/92

# Los Alamos To Gain Leading Role in N-Bomb

By John Fleck

JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

The Department of Energy, carving up responsibility for the technology used to build nuclear bombs, is preparing to give Los Alamos major new responsibilities over the nation's bomb factories of the 21st century.

The nation's other two nuclear weapons laboratories, Sandia in Albuquerque and Lawrence Livermore in California, will also be

winner under the plan, which expands the three labs' roles in planning for future manufacturing done in bomb factories around the country, lab officials say.

Faced with the task of scrapping most of its aging bomb factories, the Energy Department is asking the labs to take a central role in designing the nuclear weapons plants of the future.

It is too early to attach budget figures to the plan, but in the division of labor now under final

consideration at Department of Energy headquarters in Washington, Los Alamos gets the biggest share of the work.

And with post-Cold War budgets for designing nuclear bombs shrinking, the new work will help offset cuts, officials at all three labs said.

The plan also signals a continued DOE commitment to keeping all three laboratories working on nuclear weapons, despite pressure

from critics who say having three nuclear weapons labs is a luxury the United States can no longer afford.

"I think that what the administration and Congress are trying to do in the nuclear weapons area, and the entire defense area, is protect the research and development capability," said Ron Cochran, chief executive officer at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, in a telephone interview Thursday from his California office.

In particular, the plan splits re-

sponsibility for future plutonium research and development between Lawrence Livermore and Los Alamos. Some critics, including prominent California Democratic Congressman George Brown, have called for all plutonium work to be moved to Los Alamos.

"People wanted to maintain technical competence in this area at both laboratories," said Los Alamos Director Sig Hecker, who with his counterparts at the other two laboratories helped draw up the division

## Factories

of labor now awaiting final DOE approval.

The plan carves up the nuclear weapons turf, assigning "lead laboratories" to coordinate work on each of nine main technologies needed to build nuclear bombs.

Lead laboratories will coordinate the research and development needed to build the new factories, then oversee construction and start-up.

Los Alamos will get five of the nine areas, with Sandia and Lawrence Livermore taking charge of two each.

Responsibility in a 10th area, safe cleanup and storage of the plutonium left over from years of U.S. nuclear weapons work, will also go to Los Alamos.

That will not mean moving workers from lab to lab, officials said.

Instead, lead laboratories will coordinate work done by researchers spread out among the laboratories.

Despite the fact that no workers will be moved now under the plan, one analyst following the discussions said Los Alamos is headed toward garnering the largest share of future work.

"It seems evident that Los Alamos is getting a broader responsibility for a larger area of work than the other two labs," said Tom Zamora, a Washington, D.C., writer and nuclear weapons analyst for the environmental group Friends of the Earth.

The plan should become final by late July, and no major changes are expected between now and then, according to a Department of Energy source involved in the plan's approval who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Work in the assigned roles would begin soon after, in preparation for the planned August 1993 completion of preliminary plans for the new nuclear weapons complex, but some of the work is already under way, laboratory officials said.

Congressional approval is not required.

The plan sketches a significantly larger role for the laboratories in overseeing nuclear weapons production than they have held in the past.

"We'll be much more involved," said Harry Saxton, director of Sandia's Manufacturing Engineering and Support Center.

That is consistent with a growing trend in U.S. industry toward having designers for major high-tech products work more closely with the people who have to build them.

Under the proposed division of labor, Los Alamos will be in charge of all processing of the key chemicals used to make a nuclear bomb, including plutonium, uranium, tritium and lithium.

### THE ROLES

Lead laboratory roles the Department of Energy is assigning to the three U.S. nuclear weapons laboratories:

#### Los Alamos National Laboratory:

- Tritium (used in hydrogen bombs)
- Uranium
- Lithium (used in hydrogen bombs)
- Plutonium processing
- Plutonium disassembly and storage
- Nuclear subassemblies (the nuclear parts within a bomb)

#### Sandia National Laboratories:

- Non-nuclear components
- Overall bomb assembly

#### Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory:

- Plutonium manufacturing
- High explosives

# DOE team to visit <sup>8/16/92</sup> laboratory

## Monitor Staff Report

Donald F. Knuth, Department of Energy deputy assistant secretary for facilities, will visit Los Alamos National Laboratory this week.

Knuth will be accompanied by: Daniel R. Rhoades, director of the DOE Office of Research, Development and Technology; Roger L. Dintaman, director of the Sandia National Laboratories/LANL Facilities Division; Edward G. Lazur, director of the Office of Construction and Capital Projects; William Hensley, director of the Office of Field Security and Oversight; and Theodore H. Koch of SAIC.

LANL's Dennis J. Erickson will welcome them.

On Monday, they will be briefed on LANL conduct of operations by Michael T. Terry and Joan M. Boudreau; on seismic conditions by M. Dean Keller; on the Working Group to Address Los Alamos Community Health Concerns by Harry Otway; and on Technical Area 21 by Alexander Gancarz, Raymond Garde and Phillip Eller.

On Tuesday, they will hold discussions with senior management members including LANL Director Sig Hecker; Eugene M. Wewerka; Erickson; Allen J. Tiedman; Michael G. Stevenson; and Sharon R. Eklund.

They also will tour the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Building with Allen Hartford and Jim Phoenix; and they will tour the Plutonium Facility with Delbert H. Harbur and Annell Danczyk.

On Wednesday, they will visit the high-explosive facilities and high-pressure tritium laboratory at Technical Area 33 with George G. Hill, Earle Marie Hanson and Rudy Valdez; Technical Area 18 with Richard Malenfant, Christopher M. Steele, and others; and the Los Alamos Area Office of the DOE.

The closeout will be led by technical host John M. Puckett

# DOE Eyes Los Alamos Lab for Plutonium Work

By John Fleck

JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

When a Department of Energy team convened in January to consider the future of U.S. plutonium supplies, it faced a simple fact: Los Alamos National Laboratory is the most capable plutonium-handling site in the country.

Los Alamos can store plutonium, process the substance and make nuclear bomb parts out of it, according to a report from the January meeting.

And the DOE is considering Los Alamos

as the location for all three of those jobs, the report said.

While non-government experts have long contended Los Alamos was a likely candidate for the plutonium work, the task force report is the first DOE acknowledgment that such a possibility is under active consideration.

A move toward nuclear weapons production work could shift the New Mexico laboratory away from its traditional research and development role, the report acknowledged.

Los Alamos officials repeatedly have said

they oppose such a shift.

But faced with a surplus of plutonium and a shortage of options, the DOE may have no choice but to turn to Los Alamos, said Brian Costner, a South Carolina environmentalist and author of a separate, independent study of U.S. plutonium operations.

It will be months before the Energy Department makes public its plutonium plans.

Agency officials have not responded to written questions about their deliberations.

But the report from the January meeting of the DOE's Plutonium Strategy Task

Force Steering Committee, along with other documents recently made public, shed light on the agency's thinking.

What they spell out is that Los Alamos plays a central role in that thinking.

With no current plans to build more nuclear weapons, the DOE is scrambling to decide what to do with plutonium already made for bomb production.

Used at the heart of nuclear bombs, plutonium is a metal made in nuclear

MORE: See DOE on PAGE A5

## DOE Eyes Los Alamos for Plutonium Work

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

reactors and not found in nature. It is valued by bomb designers because it can release enormous nuclear forces when rapidly compressed by high explosives.

It also is extremely toxic, and nuclear weapons workers only handle it remotely, in sealed boxes with glove holes in the side called "glove boxes."

The size of the excess plutonium stockpile is secret, and all specific numbers were deleted from the copy of the report obtained by the Journal.

But most of the excess plutonium is believed to be in storage vaults at the department's Rocky Flats plant near Denver, according to Costner.

With the DOE closing Rocky Flats, the agency is faced with the question of where to send that plutonium.

The Rocky Flats closure also leaves the Energy Department without a place to do the plutonium processing necessary to build parts for nuclear bombs if the need arises in the near future.

The dominant option is Los Alamos, the plutonium task force report concluded.

On the question of storage, Los Alamos has by far the largest available plutonium storage capac-

ity in the nation — enough room for 60 tons in a new complex called the Nuclear Materials Storage Facility.

The next largest available storage site is an aging vault complex at Hanford Nuclear Reservation in Washington, with room for 20 tons.

The Energy Department's Savannah River Site in South Carolina, considered by Costner to be another leading candidate for storage, has room for little more than half a ton of plutonium, according to the report.

"It really dwarfs everything else," environmental engineer Jim Werner of the Natural Resources Defense Council said of Los Alamos' storage capacity.

Filling Los Alamos' vaults could take 250 or more truck trips, with the plutonium to be shipped in the same 18-wheelers used to ferry nuclear warheads around the country.

The vaults would have to be modified before they could store the Rocky Flats plutonium, but the work could be completed by 1995, according to the report.

That dovetails with the timeframe set out in the DOE's plan for the future of Rocky Flats, which envisions keeping the plutonium at the Colorado plant until 1995, while it decides where to store the plutonium from around the country.

On the question of processing

plutonium, which is necessary to prepare it for building nuclear bombs and to convert it into stable chemical mixes for storage, Los Alamos' abilities are matched only by Savannah River's, according to the report.

In addition, the Energy Department faces a decision on where to manufacture plutonium bomb parts if the need arises over the next decade.

For now, the Energy Department plans to keep two buildings at Rocky Flats in a "stand-by" capacity to build plutonium bomb parts if called upon. But the DOE, in a July report to Congress, says it will maintain that capability only until sometime next year.

After that, one option is to assign a "limited production" role to Los Alamos so the United States could maintain its ability to produce new nuclear weapons, according to the DOE task force report.

The only other option considered in the report is to retain backup production abilities at Rocky Flats for the next decade or longer, an option Costner said would be difficult to sell to Congress with Los Alamos waiting in the wings.

In the long run, the Energy Department plans to build a new Rocky Flats-type plant, to be completed sometime early in the next century.

ABQ JRNL  
8-17-92

# DOE considering plutonium work at Los Alamos

8/18/92  
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LOS ALAMOS (AP) — A Department of Energy team says the agency is considering Los Alamos National Laboratory as a site to store and process plutonium and make nuclear bomb parts.

The team's report is the first Energy Department acknowledgement that Los Alamos is a likely candidate for the plutonium work.

The report said a move toward nuclear weapons production work could shift the lab away from its traditional research and development role.

LANL officials have said they oppose such a shift.

But Brian Costner, a South Carolina environmentalist and author of a separate, independent study of U.S. plutonium plans, said the Energy Department, faced with a surplus of plutonium and a shortage of options, might have to turn to Los Alamos.

It will be months before the Energy Department makes public its plutonium plans.

The report from the January meeting of the department's Plutonium Strategy Task Force Steering Committee indicates Los Alamos plays a central role in the agency's thinking.

The Energy Department is trying to decide what to do with plutonium already made for bomb production now that there are no current plans to build more nuclear weapons.

Plutonium is a metal made in nuclear reactors that is valued by bomb designers because it can release enormous nuclear forces when rapidly compressed by high explosives.

It also is extremely toxic.

The size of the excess plutonium stockpile is secret.

Costner said most of the excess plutonium is believed to be in storage vaults at the Rocky Flats plant near Denver.

With the closure of Rocky Flats, the Energy Department is faced with the question of where to send the plutonium.

And the closure leaves the department without a place to process plutonium needed to build parts of nuclear bombs if the need arises in the near future.

The task force concluded the dominant option is Los Alamos.

The lab has by far the largest available plutonium storage capacity in the nation — enough room for 60 tons in a new complex called the Nuclear Materials Storage Facility. The next largest storage site is an aging vault complex at Hanford Nuclear Reservation in Washington, with room for 20 tons.

The report said Los Alamos' vaults could be modified by 1995 to store the Rocky Flats plutonium.

The Energy Department's plan for Rocky Flats envisions keeping the plutonium there until 1995.

Los Alamos' abilities to process plutonium are matched only by the Energy Department's Savannah River Site in South Carolina, the report said.

The department also needs to decide where to manufacture plutonium bomb parts if the need arises in

(See PLUTONIUM, Page 10)

## PLUTONIUM

(from Page 1)

the next decade.

It plans to keep two buildings at Rocky Flats in a standby capacity until sometime next year to build plutonium bomb parts if called upon.

After that, one option is to assign a "limited production" role to Los Alamos so the United States could maintain its ability to produce new nuclear weapons, the report said.

The only other option considered in the report is to keep backup pro-

duction abilities at Rocky Flats for the next decade or longer.

In the long run, the Energy Department plans to build a new Rocky Flats-type plant to be ready early in the next century.

Another clue to the department's plans came in a recent environmental report that says plutonium-processing laboratories at Los Alamos should be upgraded "to allow curtailment of plutonium operations at the Rocky Flats plant."

8/19/92

# DOE Verifies Lab May Get Plutonium

By John Fleck

JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

The head of the Energy Department's environmental programs confirmed Tuesday that the DOE is considering Los Alamos National Laboratory as a backup site for plutonium work required to build nuclear weapons.

At a news conference in Albuquerque, Assistant Energy Secretary Leo Duffy acknowledged that Los Alamos is one of five sites across the country that could be designated as a backup plutonium production site for nuclear weapons by as early as next summer.

The other sites are at Savannah River, S.C.; Hanford, Wash.; Oak Ridge, Tenn.; and the Rocky Flats Plant near Denver.

Of those five sites, Los Alamos has the most complete plutonium handling, processing and storage capabilities, Energy Department documents show.

It is the only place among the five

MORE: See DOE on PAGE A3

any shift to, production work, but left the door open to the possibility.

"We are a research and development facility and have no interest in going into the production business," he said Tuesday. "On the other hand, we realize that Los Alamos National Laboratory's facilities are owned by the Department of Energy and they have a final say on our mission."

The University of California, which manages Los Alamos for the Energy Department, also objects to production-scale plutonium processing and the manufacture of bomb parts at Los Alamos, a university official said this week.

with the current capability to build plutonium "pits," the radioactive metal spheres at the heart of nuclear weapons.

A sixth option, to leave the nation with no nuclear weapons production capability until a new, permanent factory is built sometime after the turn of the century, will also be considered, Duffy said.

Los Alamos is not a candidate site for the new permanent plutonium plant.

Los Alamos spokesman Bill Heimbach said the laboratory opposes

"The university has taken the stance all along that it doesn't get in the business of manufacturing nuclear weapons," said Tommy Ambrose, head of the university's Office of Laboratory Affairs.

But Ambrose did say the university could turn over management of weapons production to a private company.

The question of where to build plutonium parts for nuclear weapons arose after the Energy Department's Rocky Flats Plant in Colorado, where the work was done in the past, was closed because of environmental and safety problems.

One option would be to retain two buildings at Rocky Flats in a "cold standby" status to build plutonium bomb parts, meaning they could be ready to build bomb parts within three to five years' notice, according to the Energy Department.

Other plutonium work, including storage of plutonium being cleaned out of Rocky Flats and large-scale chemical processing of plutonium, is also being considered for Los Alamos, according to the Energy Department documents.

Duffy confirmed that plutonium processing is also being considered for Los Alamos, but would not comment on plutonium storage.

Ambrose said the University of California has not taken a position on the question of storing plutonium removed from Rocky Flats at Los Alamos.

The possibility of plutonium production work or storage at Los Alamos drew criticism from others this week.

"Los Alamos is a research facility, and that's what I think it needs to remain," said Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., in a telephone interview.

Bingaman said he would object to any attempt to expand Los Alamos' mission to plutonium storage and processing or production of nuclear weapons parts.

Many New Mexico residents apparently agree, according to an opinion poll conducted in March.

The survey, conducted for Los Alamos National Laboratory by the University of New Mexico Institute for Public Policy, found 51 percent of New Mexicans polled opposed the idea of expanded nuclear weapons work at Los Alamos, said laboratory spokesman Heimbach.

Thirty-six percent of the 557 New Mexicans surveyed supported expansion of Los Alamos' nuclear weapons work, Heimbach said. The poll's margin of error was plus or minus 5 percentage points.

8/19/92 #A3

# DOE Confirms Los Alamos Lab Could Get Plutonium Work

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

# State's <sup>8/19/92</sup> warhead number on rise

By KEITH EASTHOUSE  
The New Mexican

The number of nuclear warheads stored in New Mexico has jumped from 410 in 1985 to 2,090 today, according to a report that will be published next month in *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*.

No other state in the country is home to as many nuclear weapons, except South Carolina, which has 2,258, the report said.

■ **WHAT IF?:** If the United States decides it needs more nuclear warheads, LANL probably would shift from designing bombs to building them, a member of an environmental watchdog group says.

Page A-2

However, the number of warheads in New Mexico is expected to decline to 150 by the year 2000 as the U.S. dismantles its arsenal in the wake of the Cold War.

The information also is contained in a 33-page study called "Taking Stock: U.S. Nuclear Deployments at the End of the Cold War." The study was released this month by the environmental groups Greenpeace and the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Most of the nuclear weapons in New Mexico are stored at Albuquerque's Kirtland Air Force Base. Other weapons are stored just outside Albuquerque in Manzano Mountain, formerly called Manzano Base, an old Air Force storage depot now being used by the Energy Department.

The report also said nuclear warhead prototypes are stored at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

The weapons at Kirtland include nuclear-tipped artillery shells and short-range nuclear warheads, the report said.

The reason for the increase in weapons stored in New Mexico is a massive shift of nuclear weapons from overseas — particularly Europe — to the United States. The weapons are being brought home to be stored and eventually dismantled as the Cold War ends.

South Carolina and New Mexico

Please see **WARHEADS**, Page A-2



# Report: LANL could make bombs

By KEITH EASTHOUSE  
The New Mexican

If the United States were to resume building nuclear warheads, Los Alamos National Laboratory would probably shift from designing bombs to building them, a member of an environmental watchdog group said Tuesday.

If that happened, the chance of lab operations contaminating the environment could increase, because production work requires large quantities of plutonium — the highly radioactive metal used to trigger nuclear explosions.

"Probably the most important question is will the U.S. need new warheads in the future," said Brian Costner of the Energy Research Foundation of Columbia, S.C.

With the end of the Cold War, the U.S. has stopped building new nuclear weapons and is reducing its stockpile. But there is always the possibility production could resume if Russia or some other country is perceived as a sufficient threat.

In the absence of such a threat, Costner said, the U.S. Department of Energy may decide to leave its excess plutonium supplies — the plutonium that has not yet been put in warheads — where they are. That stockpile is primarily at the Rocky Flats plant near Denver.

But in the face of a military threat, Costner said the plutonium supplies — or a portion of them — are likely to be shipped to Los Alamos, where they could be used to fabricate plutonium "pits" that trigger nuclear explosions.

Costner said the fact that the lab has been involved in nuclear weapons production before — in the 1940s and early 1950s,

and again in the 1980s — increases the likelihood it could happen again.

A LANL official said the lab does not want to become involved in nuclear weapons production.

"Our position is that we are an R&D facility and that we're not interested in getting into production work," said Bill Heimbach. "We're not interested in becoming Fort Plutonium."

Plutonium may be shipped to Los Alamos regardless of the international situation or the desires of laboratory officials.

In a January report by a DOE task force, Los Alamos was identified as a possible interim plutonium storage and processing facility until a permanent facility is built.

Previously, plutonium storage and processing and plutonium pit fabrication all took place at Rocky Flats. But the DOE is in the process of closing the plant, which has been plagued with environmental and worker safety problems.

Only two options were cited in the task force report regarding building plutonium bomb parts over the next decade or so: retain production capabilities at Rocky Flats or convert Los Alamos into a "limited production" facility.

The report contrasts with a statement made by Energy Secretary James D. Watkins at a press conference in Los Alamos two years ago, when he said he had "no intention to even consider" transferring plutonium production functions from Rocky Flats to Los Alamos.

Los Alamos is not under consideration as a permanent replacement to Rocky Flats. Such a facility would take 10 years to complete and cost between \$6 billion and \$10 billion. The DOE is considering five sites

for the facility, according to Richard Claytor, assistant secretary for defense programs.

Costner and Jim Werner of the Natural Resources Defense Council in Washington D.C., co-wrote a recently released report titled *Rethinking Plutonium: A Review of Plutonium Operations in the U.S. Nuclear Weapons Complex*.

Instead of fabricating plutonium pits Werner said, the DOE could re-use existing plutonium pits in nuclear weapons stored at the DOE's Pantex Plant in Texas.

But Werner said if the DOE decides that is not feasible, and if the U.S. sees a need to build new nuclear weapons, he agrees with Costner that Los Alamos could find itself in the bomb production business.

## WARHEADS

Continued from Page A-1

have more nuclear weapons than other states because they contain the nation's two major storage depots for nuclear weapons: Kirtland and the Naval Weapons Station in Charleston, S.C.

The stockpile at Kirtland should begin to decline shortly as warheads are shipped to the DOE's PANTEX plant outside Amarillo, Tex., where they will be dismantled.

Beginning in October, 2,000 warheads a year — or seven a day — will be disassembled at the PANTEX plant, the report said.

By the year 2000, when the bulk of the dismantlement will be complete, New Mexico will be one of only 17 states with nuclear weapons, the report said.

↑ NM warheads 1985 = 410  
" " 1992 = 2090 !

8-19-92 Santa Fe New Mexican

# Groups: DOE wants plutonium at LANL

By KEITH EASTHOUSE  
The New Mexican

A coalition of 20 environmental groups from across the country say the U.S. Department of Energy is not adequately informing the public on how it plans to manage vast quantities of nuclear weapons materials left over from the Cold War.

In a letter to Energy Secretary James D. Watkins dated Aug. 21, the coalition — which includes Santa Fe's Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety — charges the agency with failing to involve the public in making decisions about the storage and long-term management of an estimated 100 tons of plutonium and 500 tons of highly en-

riched uranium.

The bulk of the material is in warheads being returned to the United States for eventual disassembly at DOE's Pantex Plant in Amarillo, Tex. The DOE plans to keep the plutonium from retired warheads at the Texas facility until long-term plans are developed.

Plutonium also is located at several other DOE facilities, including Los Alamos National Laboratory.

In a May 20 memo, Richard Claytor, assistant secretary for defense programs, asked LANL officials to explore the potential for storing plutonium from DOE's Rocky Flats plant and the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California at Los Alamos.

LANL officials are opposed

to having the laboratory serve as a plutonium storehouse. They also have expressed opposition to the possibility that the lab could replace Rocky Flats as a plutonium processing and production facility.

Such facilities pose a much greater hazard to the environment because they require the handling of large quantities of plutonium.

John Stroud of CCNS said unless the Energy Department starts providing the public with more information about its intentions, "we will soon be presented with a *fait accompli*."

"If (DOE) is allowed to make decisions behind closed doors, we will have Fort Plutonium (at Los Alamos) before we know it," Stroud said.

# LANL behaving like Cold War still on, report says

By KEITH EASTHOUSE  
The New Mexican

11/18/92

Despite the end of the Cold War, Los Alamos National Laboratory is clinging to its nuclear weapons mission and is not making a strong enough commitment to non-weapons work, according to a report released Tuesday by a local watchdog group.

One of the report's authors said at a news conference in Santa Fe that current top-level managers at the lab — including lab director Sig Hecker — need to be replaced before the lab will make such a commitment.

The report by Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety said that unless the laboratory diversifies into non-weapons work, it could become obsolete — or forced into becoming the Energy Department's central plutonium storage and processing facility,

a role that had been performed by the now closed Rocky Flats plant outside of Denver.

Laboratory officials, who have been asked by DOE to explore the potential of taking over some of Rocky Flats' plutonium responsibilities, have repeatedly expressed opposition to serving as a replacement for Rocky Flats.

"If (LANL) takes over production responsibilities for nuclear weapons, it could mean the decline of the laboratory as a respectable institution," said John Stroud of CCNS.

Lab spokesman Bill Heimbach said the CCNS report, which was based mainly on lab documents and interviews with lab personnel, contains "the same old anti-nuclear rhetoric that everybody is tired of."

Heimbach defended top management at the lab, including Hecker,

saying the report ignores several accomplishments the lab has made in the past year or two toward making the switch to non-weapons work.

He also criticized the report for relying on out-of-date budget figures culled from the laboratory's five-year institutional plan, which was released last October and written several months before.

"That report was written before the end of the Cold War, so it's misleading to focus on it," Heimbach said.

Greg Mello, who wrote the CCNS report, said the institutional plan was used because it contained the only information available on the laboratory's budgetary plans for the future.

Mello said the budgets forecast for the next five years are essentially "business as usual," with the nuclear weapons research and development budget accounting for more than half

of the lab's \$1.1 billion budget.

Mello proposed several alternative budgets that would slash the size of the nuclear weapons program and increase funding in other areas, such as in nuclear non-proliferation work.

Heimbach said there have been shifts in emphasis in the nuclear weapons budget, such as devoting a large portion to environmental analysis and clean-up work. He also said the work force involved in the nuclear weapons research, development and testing program has shrunk by 30 percent during the past five years.

Mello's report, while arguing that the lab must give higher priority to non-weapons works, cites several barriers to making such a transition, including LANL's remote location and large bureaucracy.

# Lab built plutonium battery cores

Los Alamos  
Monitor  
1/22/92

By The Associated Press

Los Alamos National Laboratory produced plutonium battery cores for nuclear warheads from 1980 to 1990, a lab spokesman said.

Spokesman Jim Danneskiold said Friday the lab built the cores for less than 4,000 batteries.

Information about the battery cores and the lab's role in building them has been unclassified for several years but has never been made public, officials said.

Lab officials have consistently said the laboratory does only nuclear weapons research and design work.

But Danneskiold said the lab's production of very small pieces of weapons doesn't mean the lab is a "bomb factory."

Danneskiold said no DOE facility is making the parts any more, since no new nuclear weapons are being produced.

"Every process in the nuclear weapons complex has been done at Los Alamos (National Laboratory) at one time or another," he said, since the lab researched and designed the processes.

"It's only logical" that the lab function "in a backup capacity" with the closing of the Rocky Flats production center in Colorado, he added.

It was disclosed earlier this year that the laboratory was involved in large-scale processing of plutonium for nuclear weapons in the early 1980s.

The batteries are called radioisotope thermoelectric generators, or RTGs, and were built at the Energy Department's Pinellas plant near St.

Petersburg, Fla., Danneskiold said.

The lab's manufacture of the plutonium cores demonstrates that it has taken part in building nuclear bombs, said Brian Costner of the Energy Research Foundation, an environmental research group based in Columbia, S.C.

John Stroud of the Santa Fe-based Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety agreed.

"It's extremely distressing to find we can't put any credibility in the statements of lab management, particularly at such a critical time for the future of the lab and the region," Stroud said.

Danneskiold said, "obviously we're producing something, but it is not something solely used for

(Please see CORES, Page A-8)

nuclear weapons."

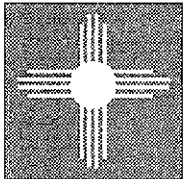
He said the laboratory has been involved in producing RTG plutonium cores since the 1960s as a power source for a number of non-weapons projects, including NASA spacecraft and satellites that verify nuclear arms treaties.

Danneskiold said that before 1980, the RTG cores for nuclear weapons were made at the Energy Department's Mound plant in Ohio. He said he did not know why the work was transferred to Los Alamos.

The last plutonium core was produced at LANL in 1990 and "there are no current plans to make RTG's for weapons again anywhere in the DOE complex," Danneskiold said.

Steven Aftergood of the Federation of American Scientists, a research and advocacy group in Washington, D.C., said the plutonium cores built by LANL produce heat which is converted by the battery into electricity.

The energy produced by the battery does not have anything directly to do with detonating the warhead, Aftergood said.



# SANTA FE/REGION

## DOE will send plutonium cores to Los Alamos lab

By KEITH EASTHOUSE *12/15/ka*  
The New Mexican

Plutonium cores used to evaluate the condition of nuclear warheads will be shipped from the Department of Energy's Rocky Flats weapons plant outside Denver to Los Alamos National Laboratory, according to a DOE report.

The shipment of the cores, called "surveillance pits," will not happen for at least three years, according to LANL spokesman Jim Danneskiold.

Nonetheless, the planned shipment of the cores for storage and use at Los Alamos is the latest indication that the lab is taking over some of the functions once performed at Rocky Flats, a nuclear weapons production facility shut down because of pollu-

tion and safety problems.

Last month, an internal Energy Department memo was made public disclosing that the Energy Department intends to designate LANL as a manufacturing site for non-nuclear parts in nuclear weapons. The parts had been made at Rocky Flats.

The report, dated Oct. 1, is called the Mission Transition Program Management Plan. It did not specify how many surveillance pits will be sent to LANL or how much plutonium each pit contains.

Danneskiold declined to disclose how many surveillance pits would be sent to LANL.

John Stroud of Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety, a local environmental group, said the shipment plan is evidence that "LANL is in active

transition into (nuclear weapons) production activity.

"This is happening without any opportunity for public comment or influence on decisions that could dramatically affect the safety, security and environmental hazards of operations at LANL," Stroud said.

Danneskiold said no new functions are being transferred to the lab. He said the lab has used surveillance pits to evaluate nuclear weapons stockpiles in the past. He also said that the lab has maintained a regular program of direct inspection of nuclear warheads.

He said stockpile evaluation is a natural function for LANL, a nuclear weapons research and design facility. He said it is not evidence that the lab is becoming involved in nuclear

weapons production, which carries a greater risk of radiation exposure to workers and environmental contamination.

"We consider the study of the capability of various weapons components and the effects of aging on these components to be (research and development)," Danneskiold said.

"Since Rocky Flats shut down, the lab has expected there would be an increase in stockpile evaluation activities because Rocky Flats was doing similar things" in those areas, Danneskiold said.

He said a surveillance pit is a replica of the plutonium core used in a warhead to initiate the chain reaction that sets off a nuclear explosion.

Surveillance pits are inspected on a periodic basis to assess how pluto-

onium pits in warheads are aging.

The advantage of surveillance pits, which are inspected through X-rays and other techniques, is that they can be examined without having to dismantle a warhead.

"These units have never been used in warheads and were never intended to be used in warheads," Danneskiold said. "They're like spare parts made so inspections could be performed."

The report says the surveillance pits will remain at Rocky Flats "until LANL is ready to receive them."

Danneskiold said LANL would not be ready to receive the pits until a planned \$17.5 million upgrade of the lab's Nuclear Materials Storage Facility is completed.

The upgrade is on hold because of a lack of funding, he said.

# N.M. Labs May Build N-Weapons

By John Fleck 12/13/92

JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Instead of just designing nuclear bombs, scientists at Sandia and Los Alamos national laboratories may start building part of them under a proposal unveiled Tuesday by the U.S. Department of Energy.

The proposal, a response to the vanishing need for new nuclear weapons, calls on the labs to be ready to manufacture some of the parts they only designed and built test prototypes of in the past.

At Los Alamos, the work would

involve metal work and tiny explosives, while Sandia would build electronic parts. The plan stops short of a more controversial proposal to build the bombs' primary radioactive explosive components at Los Alamos.

The proposal will now undergo public review, and the Energy Department is expected to make a final decision by May. John McKean, spokesman for New Mexico Gov. Bruce King, cautioned that any current proposals could be changed by the Clinton administration.

The proposal comes as aging Cold War bomb factories are being shut down and the Energy Department tries to decide how to maintain the capability to build nuclear weapons in the future.

Some new factory buildings would be built, near Kansas City and in South Carolina, under the DOE plan. But they would be smaller than those envisioned under a similar proposal floated a year ago.

Having Sandia and Los Alamos do the work in existing laboratories and shrinking construction at other sites could save \$130 million or

more a year, Howard Canter, deputy assistant secretary of Energy, said during a telephone news conference Tuesday.

At Sandia, the proposal could create 300 jobs, though many of them would be filled by current employees, said Sandia spokesman Rod Geer. Los Alamos' share of the work can be done with existing staff, according to the DOE.

Under the plan, Sandia and Los Alamos laboratories used now for building prototype bomb parts would be used instead to make parts for actual nuclear weapons. It

## They Design

would mark a return to the early days of the nuclear weapons program, when Los Alamos and Sandia were the nation's only nuclear weapons factories, turning out a few bombs at a time.

Sandia would get responsibility for some of the electronic components used to help detonate a nuclear bomb. Sandia also would build "neutron generators," or small devices that help kick-start a nuclear blast.

Los Alamos would build the shells that surround the weapons' primary explosive, made out of the metal

beryllium. Los Alamos also would build stainless steel parts and the tiny explosive detonators used to set off the nuclear blast.

If the proposal is accompanied by a general cutback in nuclear weapons spending, it would not necessarily be a bad thing, said Greg Mello, a member of the Los Alamos Study Group, which works to convert Los Alamos to non-military research.

But it carries with it a risk that the labs could become further entrenched in defense work.

# NEW MEXICO

Wednesday, February 10, 1993

Albuquerque Journal

Page 1, Section D

## Los Alamos Seeks Weapon-Building Capability

By John Fleck

JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Los Alamos National Laboratory, long a designer of nuclear weapons, plans to add the capability by 1997 to build them, according to internal laboratory documents made public this week by a Santa Fe peace group.

The documents, including a Jan. 22 copy of the laboratory's internal "Strategic Plan," lay out a detailed plan for turning Los Alamos into what lab Director Sig Hecker described last year as "a full-service lab."

Los Alamos has long built specialized nuclear explosives for underground tests conducted in Nevada. Now, according to the Strategic Plan, Los Alamos wants to develop a top-to-bottom capability to build all the key parts for war-ready nuclear bombs.

The Los Alamos Study Group, the Santa Fe-based peace group that released the plan, complained the document is at odds

### '97 Target Date Revealed in Laboratory Documents

with Los Alamos officials' public statements that the lab doesn't want to get into the bomb-building business.

"They may not want to do it, but they're very happy to accept the money that will put them in a position to do it," said Greg Mello, one of the group's leaders.

Laboratory public affairs director Scott Duncan issued a statement Tuesday complaining about the release of what he called an "internal" document. He declined further comment.

The plan comes as some of the nation's existing nuclear weapons factories, such as the Rocky Flats Plant outside Denver, are being closed because of safety and environmental problems.

The Strategic Plan outlines steps necessary to give Los Alamos the capability, by 1997, to build stockpile bomb parts out of plutonium, uranium and lithium — key

components ensuring a bomb's nuclear blast.

Whether the lab would actually build bombs is an open question.

The nation isn't building any new nuclear weapons now, and John Immele, head of Los Alamos' nuclear weapons program, told congressional staff members Jan. 12 that it will be 15 years before bomb manufacturing resumes.

By then, according to current government policy, a new nuclear weapons factory will be completed somewhere in the country. But that plan has its critics, who say Congress is unlikely to fund the multibillion-dollar cost of the new plant.

That, and Los Alamos' capabilities, will create pressure to do the work at the New Mexico lab, said Tom Zamora-Collina, an author and nuclear weapons analyst at the environmental group Friends of the Earth in Washington, D.C.

It is a fact the laboratory acknowledges. "Pressure for the Laboratory to take on additional ... manufacturing ... responsibilities will increase," the Strategic Plan states.

The Strategic Plan variously refers to its new manufacturing capability as the ability to build "prototype" nuclear weapons and the ability to provide "contingency" weapons production capability.

But with so few new nuclear weapons needed for the foreseeable future, the distinction between building a few "prototypes" and building bombs for the U.S. arsenal is fast disappearing, said Zamora-Collina.

Zamora-Collina said Los Alamos is borrowing a page from the book of defense planners who advocate "prototyping" — building a small number of a new high-tech weapon, even if unneeded, to maintain production capability.

The laboratory plan refers to that concept as "deterrence through capability" rather than "deterrence through targeting."

A key goal, the plan says, is to maintain the expertise at Los Alamos to "underpin the nation's ability to maintain a safe and reliable stockpile as well as to modify or produce any weapons that may be required as dictated by future national security requirements and policy."

Laboratory director Hecker released a summary version of the Strategic Plan at a news conference Jan. 22. The summary, which describes Los Alamos' efforts to expand non-military work, makes no mention of the laboratory's hope to add production capabilities.

Pressed by reporters that day on the possibility of Los Alamos taking up production work, Hecker said the lab wanted to "keep alive manufacturing technologies," but added that production of actual war weapons wouldn't be an issue any time soon.

# Lab has a secret agenda, watchdogs say

■ Los Alamos isn't telling the whole truth about its post-Cold-War plan, they say.

By **LAWRENCE SPOHN**

Staff reporter

Los Alamos National Laboratory might not be designing new nuclear weapons, but it has designs on being the nation's nuclear weapons leader, according to the lab's internal plan.

The Los Alamos Study Group, a privately funded lab watchdog based in Santa Fe, today released copies of the lab's 120-page internal Strategic Plan.

It described the plan as "startling" because it shows the lab's intent to become "the prime

steward for the nation's stockpile."

The study group contends that the lab isn't playing straight with the public by trying to emphasize the lab's refocusing on civilian research and development.

Actually, the lab wants "to consolidate a wide array of nuclear weapons activities at Los Alamos" but is not making those details part of its public statements, the group said.

"There is a tremendous difference between what LANL emphasizes publicly and what is written in this document," said Greg Mello, a physicist and researcher for the study group.

"The lab has as yet made little change from Cold War priorities, and is promoting an expanding nuclear weapons mission for itself."

Please see **ALAMOS/A9**

## **ALAMOS** From A1

He cited numerous references in the lab plan that call for building demonstration facilities that "will give LANL the ability to manufacture complete nuclear weapons as desired."

Mello criticized these proposals not only because they represent "unending nuclear weapon research, development and testing," but also because they "have serious negative implications for New Mexico's environment — and potentially its economy as well."

Los Alamos Director of Public Affairs Scott Duncan issued a one-page prepared statement on Tuesday that stated the Strategic Plan is "proprietary information" and was "designated for internal use only."

Efforts to reach appropriate laboratory officials through Duncan's office were rebuffed.

Lab officials, however, have denied they are seeking to relocate Department of Energy weapon production component

facilities to Los Alamos.

As recently as last month Director Sig Hecker said weapons production is not the crucial issue now.

Instead, the concerns have shifted to the safe dismantling of thousands of decommissioned warheads and the safe storage of abundant nuclear materials such as weapons-grade plutonium and highly enriched uranium.

Generally, officials have said the lab is shifting from designing new weapons to making existing weapons safer. It also is trying to expand its civilian research base, which Hecker says has been growing slightly over the last five years.

John Immele, who directs the lab's nuclear weapons programs, has said that it makes sense for LANL to become the primary steward of the nation's nuclear weapon stockpile because the bulk of the weapons that will remain were made or designed in Los Alamos.

In a recent news briefing on an 18-page excerpted summary of the Strategic Plan, Hecker ac-

knowledged that so far only about 4 percent of the lab's budget is going for civilian research and technology transfer efforts.

He said the lab's target this decade is boosting that percentage to between 10 percent and 20 percent, also the stated goal of President Clinton.

Hecker also pointed out that much of the growth in the lab's nuclear weapons program actually is going to non-design areas, including environmental restoration activities. These will receive some \$202 million this year out of the lab's \$1.1 billion budget.

*Albuquerque  
Tribune  
2/10/93*



Reporter 2/10/93

## LANL Busy Stopping Up Irkome Leaks

Los Alamos National Laboratory has been through a month of embarrassing leaks.

Last week, lab officials acknowledged that a nuclear reactor had been leaking radioactive water since mid-January. And

most recently, on Tuesday, they were forced to downplay a leak of their sensitive "Strategic Plan" to a citizens' watchdog group.

According to Greg Mello, spokesman for the Los Alamos Study Group, the 120-page document was obtained from an anonymous source. Intended for laboratory managers only, it outlines a broad strategy for guiding the lab through the unsure post-Cold War period in which the lab's primary mission of nuclear weapons research is being challenged.

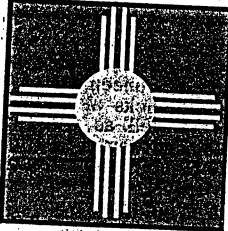
Until this week, lab officials publicly had stressed those parts of the strategy related to the conversion to civilian research. But Mello said details of the plan show the lab is "hedging its bets" and preparing for expanded nuclear activity more than previously believed.

Most worrisome, he said, is the written goal for the lab to become "the prime [Department of Energy] steward for the nation's stockpile" of nuclear weapons. That expanded role would mean new weapons manufacturing at the lab, requiring processing and storage of more dangerous materials like plutonium and tritium than have been used there in the past, Mello said.

Meanwhile, lab officials were mostly mum Tuesday. Director of Public Affairs Scott Duncan released a printed statement calling the document "proprietary information" that competing labs might use against Los Alamos in the fight for lucrative government programs.

"We believe we have the right, if not the obligation, to discuss with our employees certain issues bearing upon their future before they read or hear about it in the news media," the statement said. "Consequently, we have nothing further to say publicly regarding the Los Alamos Strategic Plan."

—M.E. Sprengelmeyer



# THE SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN

## Group says lab plans to build weapons

By KEITH EASTHOUSE  
The New Mexican

Los Alamos National Laboratory is preparing to transform itself into a facility that would build nuclear weapons, leaders of a Santa Fe environmental group said Tuesday.

Historically, the laboratory has limited itself mostly to designing and testing nuclear weapons, a job that requires much less plutonium than building bombs.

Lab officials have repeatedly said

they do not want the laboratory to become a bomb production or plutonium processing facility because of the worker safety and environmental hazards that would be involved.

However, lab director Sig Hecker said at a press conference last month that the distinction between a research facility and a production facility is not as sharp as it once was because future nuclear weapons production needs are likely to be much smaller than during the Cold War — and could be non-existent.

The Los Alamos Study Group is bas-

ing its charge that the lab will build weapons on a 120-page internal laboratory document called The Strategic Plan, a shorter version of which was presented to the media by Hecker in January.

That version stressed that the laboratory is shifting from weapons design work to a caretaker role in which the lab will focus its efforts on ensuring the safety and reliability of the remaining weapons stockpile.

The more detailed version, which was intended for internal lab use only, was obtained by the study group.

Scott Duncan, director of public affairs at the lab, said the lab would not respond to the study group's claims.

"We believe we have the right, if not the obligation, to discuss with our employees certain issues bearing upon their future before they read or hear about it in the news media," Duncan said. "Consequently, we have nothing further to say publicly regarding the Los Alamos Strategic Plan."

The document, which was provided to the media by the study group, describes plans to:

- Upgrade the laboratory's ability to

build prototypes of plutonium pits, the radioactive metal spheres at the heart of nuclear weapons, by 1994.

- Install by 1997 machining capabilities in two facilities that would allow uranium components used in nuclear weapons to be fabricated.

- Design and install another facility for fabricating additional nuclear weapons components, also by 1997.

- Complete an upgrade of Technical Area 16, the Weapons Engineering Tritium Facility, to accommodate both re-

Please see LANL, Page A-2.

# LANL

Continued from Page A-1

search and development work involving tritium and "contingency fill activities" by 1998.

■ Have in place research and development and manufacturing programs involving non-nuclear weapons components used in nuclear bombs by 1997.

Some of the plans already have been made public.

For example, in December the Energy Department announced that in response to the vanishing need for nuclear weapons, Los Alamos and Sandia National Laboratories in Albuquerque would manufacture

mean filling a nuclear weapon with tritium, an activity he said would constitute production work.

He pointed out that most of the planned upgrades and constructions are not scheduled for completion until the mid to late 1990s, after a congressional ban on underground nuclear testing goes into effect.

Since testing is considered crucial for research and design work, Mello said that the completion dates indicate that the work that will be done will be production work.

Mello said that a part of the

## Some people, including DOE critics, have suggested that weapons development and production work could be consolidated at Los Alamos, where the lab could remanufacture plutonium pits in a small, stable arsenal as the need arises.

some of the non-nuclear parts they had only made prototypes of in the past.

Additionally, in the past year there have been indications that nuclear weapons production work formerly done at the DOE's Rocky Flats plant near Denver may be temporarily transferred to Los Alamos until a permanent production facility can be built.

The Rocky Flats plant is closed due to environmental, health and safety problems.

Some people, including DOE critics, have suggested that weapons development and production work could be consolidated at Los Alamos, where the lab could remanufacture plutonium pits in a small, stable arsenal as the need arises.

The lab already has the capability to build plutonium pits. It also has plutonium handling, processing and storage capabilities.

Greg Mello, of the study group called the strategic plan "a detailed plan to develop the capability to make nuclear weapons in Los Alamos."

He said the phrase "contingency fill activities" could

plan which lists various future construction projects in the lab's nuclear weapons program demonstrates that the lab is not turning away from nuclear weapons work.

"Most of the construction projects called for in the plan serve LANL's military, rather than civilian, research and development (needs)," Mello said.

Duncan said one reason the lab refused to respond to the study group's claims is that the document contains information that could be used by the lab's competitors.

"We view this as proprietary information that could be useful to the laboratory's competitors for particular programs and funding, or could be used by potential Los Alamos contractors to gain an unfair advantage," Duncan said.

Mello said that proprietary information — as a reason not to make something public — would be legitimate if the lab was a private business instead of a government agency.

He said that "volunteering Northern New Mexico to be host to these kinds of things should be publicly discussed."

## 3 LANL employees contaminated on job

By KEITH EASTHOUSE  
The New Mexican

Three workers at Los Alamos National Laboratory were contaminated with radioactivity in two separate incidents last week at Technical Area 55, the laboratory's top-secret plutonium research complex.

Low levels of radioactivity were detected in the nasal passages of all three workers, according to Department of Energy reports of the incidents obtained by *The New Mexican*.

The report did not specify what type of radioactive substance was involved. Lab spokesman Jim Danneskiold declined to disclose the nature of the material.

Danneskiold said the only way the workers could have been placed in danger is if the contamination had entered their lungs. He said tests performed on the workers' after the contamination incidents found no evidence that had happened.

"There was no uptake," Danneskiold said.

The contaminant may have been plutonium, a radioactive metal used in nuclear bombs, which is the main radioactive material handled at TA-55.

Plutonium is most dangerous when inhaled into the lungs. Extremely small quantities of plutonium have been linked with lung cancer.

The contamination incidents came about two weeks after two other workers at TA-55 were contaminated with plutonium while cleaning up after an experiment in the facility's plutonium processing area.

Plutonium was detected in those workers' nostrils, but the levels of radioactivity involved in that case were significantly higher than in the latest incidents, Danneskiold

said. Radioactivity was not detected in the lungs of those workers either, he said.

"I would characterize that as a serious contamination incident," Danneskiold said.

He said that the more recent incidents were not as severe.

The incidents last week occurred Feb. 1.

In one of the incidents, two of the workers were contaminated after they had unwrapped a package containing nuclear materials, according to the report.

The workers followed proper procedures and were wearing protective equipment, Danneskiold said. The problem, he said, was that the materials, packaged several years ago, were not wrapped as safely as they would be by today's standards.

"They were packed in conformance to the standards that were in existence then," Danneskiold said.

In addition to the contamination in their nasal passages, the workers received contamination on their protective equipment, the report said. Radioactivity was also detected on the arms and neck of one of the workers, according to the report.

In the other incident, a technician was contaminated because a radioactive handling device that the worker was using called a glove box had a hole in the glove, according to the report.

Radioactivity was detected on the technician's forehead and left calf, probably because the worker touched those places after removing the contaminated hand from the glove box, Danneskiold said.

The workers' health will be monitored, he said.

Contamination incidents described as "serious" by

# Opinions

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Thursday, February 11, 1993

## Editorials

### Time to talk

Los Alamos National Laboratory officials are so darned slick. Witness the recent release of a much more detailed Strategic Plan than the streamlined version released earlier by the lab.

The detailed version, which came into the hands of the Los Alamos Study Group in Santa Fe, apparently outlines lab plans to transform LANL into a facility that could build nuclear weapons.

Lab officials wouldn't comment on the allegations by the Los Alamos Study Group, stating, instead, that, "We believe we have the right, if not the obligation, to discuss with our employees certain issues bearing upon their future before they read or hear about it in the news media."

When — exactly — was this discussion going to take place?

Top dogs at the lab wanted it both ways, apparently. They wanted to play up in public their plans to convert to peaceful work by taking up the challenge of industrial competitiveness, while downplaying nuclear weapons plans.

Why release a deficient summary of "The Strategic Plan"? Why not start a dialogue with lab employees and the community on the new directions for the laboratory?

It's been clear for quite some time that powerful interests hope to to convert the laboratory into a nuclear weapons complex. Is this the route laboratory officials have chosen to follow?

In short, the release of the fuller Strategic Plan was a public service by the Los Alamos Study Group.

The lab's response was a return to the old days: "Tell 'em only what they need to know."

Too bad.

Los Alamos Monitor

DIGEST

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without details, Duncan said.

"We believe we have the right, if not the obligation, to discuss with our employees certain issues bearing upon their future before they read or hear about it in the news media," Duncan said. "Consequently, we have nothing further to say publicly regarding the Strategic Plan."

### Lab declines comment on plan

Scott Duncan, director of Los Alamos National Laboratory's Public Affairs Division, said in a statement Tuesday that the lab won't release the full version of the lab's Strategic Plan.

The content of the plan was the subject in news stories all over North America New Mexico Wednesday when the Los Alamos Study Group said the plan revealed that LANL was preparing to have the capacity to produce nuclear weapons.

"We view this (Strategic Plan) as proprietary information that could be useful to the laboratory's competitors for particular programs and funding, or could be used by potential Los Alamos contractors to gain an unfair advantage," Duncan said.

Specifically, the full version of the plan contains information on unresolved issues, strategies, assumptions, timelines, budget profiles, and managers responsible for specific tasks," Duncan said.

To keep the public informed, the lab released a summary version

Monitor 2/11/93

# JOURNAL

NORTH

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## Los Alamos Can Supply All N-Bombs

### Lab's Annual Plutonium Capacity May Be Enough for 300 Weapons

By John Fleck  
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

A 15-year-old Los Alamos National Laboratory metal shop was designed to process enough plutonium to build at least 100 nuclear bombs per year, and possibly as many as 300, Department of Energy documents suggest.

Independent arms-control experts say that is enough bomb-production capacity to meet the nation's scaled-down 21st century nuclear weapons needs.

Such work used to be done at the Rocky Flats plutonium factory near Denver, which was shut down because of environmental and safety problems.

Laboratory officials dispute the 100-to-300 figure, but refused to reveal the correct number, saying Los Alamos' production capacity is a national security secret.

Portions of the building that had been set up for plutonium fabrication have been assigned other duties, said laboratory spokesman Jim Danneskiold. Danneskiold also said current, stricter worker radiation protection rules limit the amount of plutonium work that could be done.

Danneskiold also Tuesday reiterated Los Alamos' position that it

does not want to become a nuclear weapons factory, saying such a role would damage the laboratory's basic research mission.

The Energy Department is considering either building a new bomb factory somewhere in the country, or modifying existing buildings at Los Alamos to meet future U.S. nuclear weapons production needs.

Hearings have been held around the country, including two in New Mexico in September, and a decision is expected in late 1994 or early 1995.

The information on Los Alamos' plutonium production capabilities was included in more than 400 pages of documents recently released to the Journal regarding the capabilities of the laboratory's Technical Area 55, where the bulk of its plutonium work is done.

Most of the documents date to 1978, when TA-55's main plutonium building was opened, and describe its design capabilities.

It took the department two years to release the documents under the federal Freedom of Information Act.

Non-government experts consulted by the Journal said the docu-

MORE: See LOS on PAGE A7

## Los Alamos Could Supply Plutonium for All N-Bombs

ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL Wednesday, December 8, 1993 A7

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ments provide the most detailed publicly available information to help answer the question of how many bombs Los Alamos could produce.

The answer is this: It appears Los Alamos could build all of the bombs the United States would need to support a 21st century, post-Cold War arsenal, said Christopher Paine, an analyst at the Natural Resources Defense Council, a Washington, D.C., environmental group.

"The significance of it is in the ability of the lab to serve as either an interim or long-term replacement for Rocky Flats," said Brian Cosner, head of the Energy Research Foundation, a South Carolina environmental group and co-author of a study on U.S. nuclear

weapons plutonium work.

To manufacture a plutonium "pit," the explosive core of a nuclear weapon, the metal is heated to more than 1,500 degrees Fahrenheit and melted down, then poured into a graphite mold.

Pits must then be shaped to precise specifications. The work is done inside "glove boxes," which permit workers to handle the radioactive metal remotely, often using lead-lined gloves inserted through sealed portholes.

According to the documents, the metal fabrication area in TA-55 was designed to be able to process and shape 220 pounds of plutonium metal per month.

The amount of plutonium required for a nuclear weapon is a secret, but independent researchers put it at roughly 4 kilograms — 8.8 pounds. Paine said

the newly released documents suggest Los Alamos could make about 300 bombs a year. That closely matches an estimate he previously made based on other data about Los Alamos plutonium processing capabilities.

A more conservative estimate, based on the documents' statement that "up to" 12 kilograms — 26.5 pounds — may be used to manufacture a single bomb, yields a production rate of 100 bombs a year.

No one without a security clearance knows whether 100 or 200 or 300 new plutonium pits a year is enough to meet 21st century stockpile needs.

No new bombs are now being built. Questions about whether bombs in the existing stockpile will need to be replaced remain unanswered.

The Department of Energy is trying to plan its future weapons man-

ufacturing complex with a working estimate of the required annual rate of bomb production, but that number remains classified.

Paine, doing independent calculations based on best guesses at the lifespan of a nuclear bomb, put the annual requirement at 100 or less.

One government source speaking on condition of anonymity, said future needs for new pit production could be low, because some new nuclear weapons could be built around old pits removed from warheads being retired.

Using that estimate, Paine said



# Plan's collapse could mean more weapons work for LANL

By KEITH EASTHOUSE  
The New Mexican

The federal Department of Energy is backing off from a plan to build a nuclear weapons production complex that would involve environmentally hazardous work at one of five sites outside New Mexico, top DOE and LANL officials said this week.

Such a decision would increase the likelihood that much of the work will be concentrated at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

Eric Schweitzer, the DOE manager in charge of preparing an environmental impact statement for the proposed nuclear weapons complex of the 21st century — dubbed "Complex 21" — said budget constraints and public opposition

have forced the DOE to rethink its plan. "We're re-looking alternatives based on the public comments we've received and budget realities," Schweitzer said from his Washington, D.C., office.

At the lab, Paul Cunningham, program manager for nuclear materials and reconfiguration technology, said in a telephone interview that "Complex 21 as originally envisioned has lost support."

Complex 21 called for building production facilities at one or more of five possible sites — the Nevada Test Site near Las Vegas, Nev.; the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory; the Savannah River Site in South Carolina; the Oak Ridge Reservation in Tennessee; and the Pantex Site near Amarillo, Texas.

Cunningham said the decision to back

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## WEAPONS

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off from Complex 21 has gained support, in part, because the U.S. military at present — and for the foreseeable future — has not ordered that any new nuclear weapons be built.

"Do you invest in a production capacity that you have no defined requirement for? No you don't," Cunningham said.

Complex 21 would have been much smaller, less diverse and far less costly than the DOE's Cold War-era weapons complex, which consisted of 13 major facilities sprawled over 12 states. Nonetheless, it would have cost hundreds of millions of dollars to build and operate.

A cheaper alternative — on the order of tens of millions of dollars, according to Cunningham — is to upgrade existing facilities at Los Alamos and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory to give them a production capability.

LANL and Livermore traditionally have confined their activities to weapons research, development and testing. Such work requires substantially smaller quantities of plutonium, uranium, tritium and other materials and hence poses less of a hazard to workers and the environment.

The environmental impact statement that described Complex 21 said the main activity that would take place at Los Alamos — in the event that the DOE chose to upgrade existing facilities — would be plutonium work that was formerly conducted at the Rocky Flats plant near Denver.

Specifically, according to the statement, LANL would be in charge of chemically processing plutonium, the radioactive metal at the heart of most nuclear bombs. It would also be involved in forming the metal into a finished bomb part.

The lab currently has the ability to perform both functions on a small scale as part of its weapons research role.

The laboratory's "Strategic Plan," an internal document that became public in January 1993, indicated that the lab has hopes of performing a variety of other production work, including man-

ufacturing bomb parts made of uranium and developing techniques to manufacture tritium, a radioactive form of hydrogen used in nuclear bombs.

Brian Costner of the Energy Research Foundation, a South Carolina activists group, said that the amount of work the lab will get will depend on the scope of the upgrade the DOE decides to undertake.

"The lab may have a plan, but the extent of the upgrade will change and evolve along with budgets and priorities," Costner said.

Whatever the scope of the lab's role, Cunningham said that without Complex 21 it will be critical to maintain the nation's ability to produce nuclear weapons in the event new warheads are needed in the future.

He said it will also be critical for the lab to maintain the ability to replace aging bomb parts.

"We must maintain the capability to reconstruct the production capacity," Cunningham said.

Local citizens groups said the DOE's decision to back off Complex 21 in favor of an "upgrade in place" is a tactic to push the public out of the decision-making process regarding the future nuclear weapons complex.

Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group said that the majority of the public does not want the DOE or Los Alamos to maintain any nuclear weapons production capability at all.

That message, he said, came through loud and clear last fall as the DOE gathered public comments on the Complex 21 environmental impact statement.

Schweitzer of the DOE said that Mello's assessment was true. "A lot of people don't want nuclear weapons at all," Schweitzer said.

The possibility of doing nothing to maintain the DOE's nuclear weapons production capability was dismissed by the DOE in a document published last summer in the Federal Register.

"Some mission requirements for maintenance of the future weapons stockpile would not be met under the no-action alternative. Therefore, the no-action alternative is not reasonable," the DOE said.

# Critics of LANL seek moratorium on new projects

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5-  
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By KEITH EASTHOUSE  
The New Mexican

Environmental and Indian groups are seeking a moratorium on all new major projects at Los Alamos National Laboratory that might have a significant impact on the environment.

In a two-page letter to Jerry Bellows, manager of the U.S. Department of Energy's Los Alamos office, the groups said the projects should be put on hold until the DOE does a full-scale review of the environmental and health impacts of lab operations.

Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group, a Santa Fe-based

watchdog organization, said a number of projects are going forward without sufficient public review — including a plan to expand the lab's nuclear disposal area and an effort to upgrade existing facilities to give Los Alamos the capability to build nuclear bombs.

"They're trying to ram (these projects) down the throats of the public without any kind of formal public process," Mello said.

Diana Webb, an official with DOE's Los Alamos office, said a moratorium would effectively shut down the lab.

"It would be unrealistic to

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## LANL

Continued from Page A-1

think that the DOE or (the University of California) would be in a position to shut the lab down," Webb said. The university operates Los Alamos for the Department of Energy.

In addition to the Los Alamos Study Group, the organizations calling for a moratorium include Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety and the Sanctuary Foundation, both Santa Fe groups; Citizens for Alternatives to Radioactive Dumping, an Albuquerque group; Western States Legal Foundation, based in Oakland, Calif.; and the Rural Alliance for

### Military Accountability.

Webb said that instead of a blanket moratorium on all major projects, the DOE — in concert with the public — could evaluate projects on a case-by-case basis to determine which ones can't wait until the completion of a site-wide environmental impact statement.

Those projects could then be separately evaluated — again with public involvement — for their environmental and health impacts, Webb said.

One of the purposes of the site-wide EIS is to develop a complete picture of how the labora-

tory affects the environment and public health by analyzing the cumulative impact of multiple projects, rather than studying the projects separately.

Both LANL and DOE-Los Alamos officials have indicated to DOE headquarters in Washington, D.C., that they would like a full-scale environmental review done.

The review, or environmental impact statement, would cost approximately \$10 million and take from three to five years to complete.

DOE headquarters has not formally committed itself to paying

for the study, but an official with the agency's Waste Operations Division in Washington said last month that DOE was "committed to a site-wide EIS" for Los Alamos.

Webb said that officials from DOE-Los Alamos and LANL are traveling to Washington next week to discuss the issue with high-level DOE officials.

The last time a site-wide EIS was done at Los Alamos was in 1979. In comparison, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California had one done in 1982 and completed another one in 1993.

SANTA FE

## MEXICAN

## LANL may turn into top bomb factory in U.S.

By KEITH EASTHOUSE  
The New Mexican

The possibility that Los Alamos National Laboratory may develop a small-scale capability to build nuclear bombs carries the risk that large-scale nuclear weapons manufacturing could be centered at Los Alamos in the 21st century, a top lab official said.

Paul Cunningham, program manager for nuclear materials and reconfiguration technology, said it is not the lab's intention to take on a large-scale production role — which would pose great environmental and safety hazards and could interfere with the lab's much-ballyhooed effort to build ties to private industry.

But he said he couldn't rule out the possibility that once the lab has the capability to do production work on a small scale, it would eventually take on a larger role.

"We'd be opposed to that," Cunningham said. "But I can't guarantee that at some future time, if there is a need to replace (nuclear weapons) in quantity, that that wouldn't happen here."

Cunningham said that Cold War-scale production work — if there is ever a need for it again — would be more likely to happen outside New Mexico at new facilities built by the Department of Energy.

"In the unlikely event that the U.S. makes the political decision to have a major build of nuclear weapons, then we would spawn that work out of the lab," Cunningham said.

He said the country needs to maintain the capability to manufacture nuclear weapons regardless of whether the military has a

“  
I can't guarantee that . . . if there is a need to replace (nuclear weapons) . . . that that wouldn't happen here.  
”

PAUL CUNNINGHAM  
LANL program manager

need for new warheads.

There are no orders at present, nor for the foreseeable future, from the military for new nuclear weapons. Instead, the United States is in the process of dismantling nuclear weapons.

Mary Riseley of the Los Alamos Study Group, a Santa Fe-based watchdog organization, accused the laboratory of being motivated by self-interest in saying that a production capability needs to be maintained in the absence of military demand.

"We question whether maintaining production capability is not welfare for nuclear weapons designers," Riseley said.

The DOE had planned to build a nuclear weapons production complex — dubbed "Complex 21" — at one or more of five possible sites, all outside New Mexico.

But last week, Cunningham and Eric Schweitzer, the DOE man-

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ons research role.  
Last year, a laboratory official said plutonium manufacturing work would bring with it extreme security measures that would have a chilling effect on the lab's interactions with private industry.

"It doesn't fit the future of the laboratory as envisioned by our director," said Richard Mah, who at the time was director of the lab's weapons complex reconfiguration program.

Mah also said production work would detract from the lab's weapons research work and could take away funding and personnel from other defense-related projects.

But Cunningham said that a production role — as long as it remains small in scale — would not be overly disruptive to the lab's research work.

"There are certain kinds of production work that would cause only small perturbations in the R&D role," Cunningham said.

of accidental detonation of weapons.  
LANL and Livermore traditionally have confined their activities to weapons research, development and testing. Such work requires substantially smaller quantities of plutonium, uranium, tritium and other materials, and hence poses less of a hazard to workers and the environment.

The environmental impact statement that described Complex 21 said the main activity that would take place at Los Alamos in the event that the DOE chose to upgrade existing facilities would be plutonium work that formerly was conducted at the Rocky Flats plant near Denver.

Specifically, according to the statement, LANL would be in charge of chemically processing plutonium, the radioactive metal at the heart of most nuclear bombs. It also would be involved in forming the metal into a finished bomb part.

The lab has the ability to perform both functions on a small scale as part of its weap-

Continued from Page A-1  
BOMB  
ager in charge of preparing an environmental impact statement for Complex 21, said that budget constraints, public opposition and the fact that the country at present has no need for new nuclear weapons have forced the DOE to rethink its plan.

That increases the likelihood that the DOE will choose a cheaper alternative: to upgrade existing facilities at Los Alamos and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California to give them production capabilities.

Aside from maintaining the nation's capability to build nuclear weapons, an upgrade would allow Los Alamos and Livermore to play what the DOE is calling a "stewardship role" over the existing stockpile of nuclear weapons.

The role would consist of activities such as replacing aging weapons components and adding safety features to reduce the chances



# Plutonium 'pits' may be added to LANL duties

BY JOHN FLECK  
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Responsibility for manufacturing nuclear bomb parts made of uranium and tritium, in addition to plutonium, could be given to Los Alamos National Laboratory under a plan now being studied by the U.S. Department of Energy, a senior laboratory official said Friday.

The department's top nuclear weapons official this week said the DOE has abandoned plans to build a new U.S. nuclear weapons factory, leaving existing plants — primarily the nuclear weapons laboratories — as the repositories for nuclear weapons-building skills.

Los Alamos, with the most capa-

ble plutonium-handling laboratory in the country, will take over responsibility for the explosive plutonium "pits" at the heart of nuclear weapons under the plan.

The laboratory also could take over responsibility for work on uranium and tritium parts, two other key components in hydrogen bombs, said Paul Cunningham, head of Los Alamos' nuclear materials program.

Other candidate sites for uranium responsibility are Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and the Energy Department's Y-12 Plant in Tennessee, Cunningham said.

Uranium and plutonium are radioactive metals that provide a

major part of the bomb's nuclear chain reaction.

In addition to Los Alamos, the department's Savannah River Site in South Carolina is a candidate for processing tritium, a radioactive gas used to boost a bomb's explosive force.

Since 1989, the Department of Energy has planned to build a new bomb factory or factories somewhere in the country. With shrinking requirements for new bombs and rising budget pressures, however, the plan has shifted to the laboratories, which already have limited capabilities to do the work.

With no new bomb manufacturing required for the foreseeable future,

that means the labs will be required to keep bomb-building skills alive rather than to actually build bombs, Assistant Secretary of Energy Vic Reis said in an interview with the Journal.

Doing that will require some federal spending at Los Alamos to upgrade existing laboratories, said Cunningham, but how much will be spent and on what has not been decided.

One project already moving forward, even before the decision was made to give Los Alamos its manufacturing responsibilities, is a \$194 million renovation of the laboratory's Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Building.

Built in 1952, the CMR building is wearing out, and the DOE has asked Congress for \$3.3 million next year for the work. The long-range project envisions spending between \$10 million and \$30 million per year on the building until after the turn of the century.

Other building improvements will be required at Los Alamos, Cunningham said, but the precise work required has not been worked out.

The decision to abandon plans to build a new weapons factory will not affect Sandia National Laboratories, New Mexico's other nuclear weapons laboratory.

Located in Albuquerque, Sandia already had been assigned responsi-

bility for building several non-nuclear components in U.S. nuclear weapons.

The decision not to build new bomb factories is being warmly but cautiously received by arms control activists.

It sends a good signal to the rest of the world that United States has no plans to build large numbers of new nuclear weapons, said Greg Mello, a member of the Los Alamos Study Group and a leading critic of weapons work at Los Alamos.

Mello's main criticism was that the decision, like many made by the Department of Energy, appears to have been made behind closed doors, with little input from the public.

# Los Alamos Monitor

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## Expert: lab can handle plutonium safely

By STEPHEN T. SHANKLAND  
Monitor Staff Writer

In some ways, plutonium actually is easier to store than other hazardous materials, a Los Alamos National Laboratory researcher said Monday.

Thomas McLaughlin said the high levels of energy stored within plutonium guarantee that the amount of the material on hand will be relatively small. Plutonium storage involves "trivial amounts compared to coal waste," McLaughlin.

Because of the smaller amounts of material, it's more economical to take careful precautions, he said.

"I am convinced that we can handle it properly," McLaughlin said.

McLaughlin makes sure processes involving plutonium at LANL don't accumulate enough of the material to go "critical," or reach the point at which the material will sus-

tain a nuclear reaction.

McLaughlin voiced his opinions at a meeting of the Los Alamos Committee on Arms Control and International Security. He stated specifically that his remarks represented his own views and not necessarily those of the laboratory.

LANL scientists are designing facilities to store tons of weapons-grade plutonium safely, McLaughlin said. "Weapons-grade plutonium" means plutonium with a high concentration of plutonium-239, which has a lower critical mass than other, heavier isotopes. In contrast, plutonium in reactor fuel has more plutonium-240 and plutonium-241.

People concerned with nuclear weapons proliferation are concerned about the plutonium produced in reactor fuel, he said.

Uranium-238, an inactive component that accounts for most of nuclear fuel, becomes plutonium during nuclear reaction, he said.

The longer the fuel stays in the reactor, the more neutrons the plutonium acquires, and the higher the concentrations of heavier isotopes of plutonium.

This mixture of plutonium wouldn't be good for a large-scale military program concerned with high-reliability and high-yield nuclear weapons, but it could be used to build a "dirty bomb," McLaughlin said.

And a dirty bomb could suffice for a country wishing to make a political statement, he said.

Plutonium-239 has a half-life of about 25,000 years, he said.

McLaughlin described a conceptual facility to store plutonium in a three-dimensional grid. A few kilograms of plutonium would be stored in sealed steel cans. The cans would be spaced within a large solid.

The laboratory is researching such designs now.

About 50 metric tons of plutonium — 50,000 kilograms — could be stored in a cube about 30 feet on a side, but dissipating the heat the plutonium produces would require that such a cube be at least doubled in size, he said.

LANL has 2.6 metric tons of plutonium, and the U.S. has 89 metric tons of weapons-grade plutonium, the Department of Energy revealed in December 1993. DOE didn't release how much plutonium was in spent fuel stored at nuclear reactors, but McLaughlin estimated that there is 10 times as much in spent fuel as there is in weapons-grade material.

Each kilogram of plutonium generates about two watts of energy, a relatively small but still important amount, he said.

He said natural convection could be used to assure that a facility doesn't overheat in the future at a time beyond the life of human-

designed cooling mechanisms. A heated substance would rise on its own, cool, then sink back to be reheated again.

DOE is examining the possibility of converting an unused vault at Technical Area-55, LANL's Plutonium Facility, for plutonium storage, McLaughlin said.

DOE currently doesn't plan to ship plutonium from around the complex to LANL, but McLaughlin noted that policies could change.

LANL officials have gone on record opposing the storage of the DOE complex's plutonium at LANL, McLaughlin said.

The unused vault was intended for uranium storage, not plutonium storage, and would require substantial modifications if it were to store plutonium, he said.

For example, uranium doesn't produce nearly as much heat as plutonium, he said.

# Santa Fe rips LANL nuclear work

(Major organizing project of Study Group)

By STEPHEN SHANKLAND  
Assistant Managing Editor  
SANTA FE - Department of Energy officials had to extend a six-hour hearing on the effects of Los Alamos National Laboratory to seven hours Wednesday, and there were still 30 people waiting to speak.

As a result, DOE added an "overflow" meeting at 6 p.m. Friday. It will be held in the New Mexico Environment Department Auditorium in the Harold Runnels Building, 1190 St. Francis, Santa Fe.

Dozens of speakers at the Wednesday hearing on the lab's Sitewide Environmental Impact Statement (SWEIS) said LANL should stop nuclear weapons work, especially building nuclear weapons components.

Among other often-repeated themes at the meeting:

- DOE should convert LANL into a "green lab" for cleanup and environmental research.
- DOE should stop construction on all major new projects at LANL until the SWEIS is complete.
- The lab should be shut down and cleaned up.
- DOE should complete its national-scale programmatic environmental impact statement before proceeding with the sitewide impact statement for LANL.

A few people from Los Alamos, including at least four members of the group Responsible Environmental Action League, also spoke at the meeting.

Chris Chandler said "an opportunity was being missed" to address how LANL handles materials "that are environmentally very dangerous." This issue is being "lost in the larger, more global issues" of nuclear policy,

she said.

The scope of the SWEIS doesn't include stockpile and nonproliferation issues, she said.

And George Chandler said that much of the fear of things nuclear at LANL is a "hysterical" response.

He suggested that the SWEIS "lay out the history of environmental management so people can read it and judge for themselves without being subjected to polemic and rhetoric."

John Horne of Los Alamos said Los Alamos is safe; otherwise, he wouldn't be raising his family there. Radiation risks are greater from flying in a high-altitude jet or living near natural uranium in Utah than from living in Los Alamos, he said.

Horne added that groups such as CCNS and the Study Group "instill fear and anger when it's not there."

"I'd like to remind you that Los Alamos has existed for 50 years to promote peace," he said. Without nuclear research, "you would not be able to stand here and make much ado about nothing."

In other remarks at the hearing:

• Amy Bunting of Santa Fe said nuclear weapons are obsolete. "Who are these enemies upon whom we would unleash this radioactive wrath?" she asked.

• Angela Treat Lyon said that when her aunt died, they found a box of inch-long pieces of string labeled, "pieces of string too short to use." Nuclear weapons, she said, are not a "viable tool," and are in the category of "weapons too dangerous to use."

• In a response to Horne's remarks, Howard Shulman said Horne "needs to know he's raising his child in a place of danger."

# LANL nuclear work

LA Monitor 6/15/95



STEPHEN T. SHANKLAND/Monitor

An anti-nuclear speaker states her views at Wednesday's afternoon scoping session in Santa Fe on the upcoming Los Alamos National Laboratory Sitewide Environmental Impact Statement.

Radioactive and toxic waste contaminates the mesas and canyons of Los Alamos, he said. "We need something on the level of the Manhattan Project" to clean up 50

years' mess.

"I'm alive because of two atom bombs" that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, said Alfred Hobbs of Taos. But he said

it's time to stop. "I'm alive today. I just never want to see another one. Never again," Hobbs said.

(Please see SWEIS, Page 9)

**SWEIS**

(from Page 1)

• Susan Hirschberg of Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety said that LANL should increase nonproliferation work, increase safe energy work, increase environmental research, and decrease weapons work.

"If LANL's mission is truly to reduce the nuclear danger, then concentrating on nonproliferation and decreasing the world's dependence on nuclear power (the raw materials for which also can lead to nuclear proliferation) is an excellent way to meet that mission," she said.

• LANL should concentrate on energy efficiency and sustainable energy, Jill Cliburn said.

• "The money that the national policy makers are spending on DOE programs in Los Alamos is desperately needed in the streets of America today," said Don Brayfield of Santa Fe, referring to crime problems he's seen in Santa Fe. "America is rotting from the inside, and LANL is facilitating that rot. I want you to concentrate your evil nuclear crap on Los Alamos" so the Jemez Mountains volcano will bury it, he

said.

• Greg Mello, an activist with the Santa Fe-based Los Alamos Study Group said the orderly shutdown alternative should be put back in the SWEIS.

(DOE said that, "In view of the limited community interest and DOE's view ... that a decision to shut down LANL operations within the five- to 10-year time frame of the SWEIS would be highly unlikely," it decided not to go forward with the shutdown alternative.)

• Eric Dibner of Santa Fe said converting LANL to peace and health research should be an option in the SWEIS. He also said the lab is alien to New Mexico.

• Garland Harris of Citizens for Alternatives to Radioactive Dumping in Albuquerque said DOE "should find a way to green the lab

or shut it down. The fact is, you need to get out of the (nuclear weapons) business."

• Virginia Weppner of Santa Fe said she's concerned that funding shortages, not technological difficulties, will be what holds back cleanup. She asked, "How many years in the future can the government guarantee responsible maintenance" of LANL?

• Suchi Solomon of Santa Fe said building bombs is "a gigantic waste of time, money, and natural resources."

• "Shutdown and cleanup" are the only options for LANL, said Katherine Lage.

• "I don't want Los Alamos to be a dumping ground for the country's nuclear and chemical waste," said Cari Eisler with the New Mexico Green Party.

## Hearing sought on N-weapons plan

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

Will tourists still come to Santa Fe if Los Alamos begins making plutonium "pits" — the triggers for nuclear warheads?

Santa Fe Mayor Debbie Jaramillo is worried that tourism will suffer if the U.S. Department of Energy selects the Los Alamos National Laboratory to produce the devices.

In a letter to Tara O'Toole, the DOE's assistant secretary of environment, safety and health, Jaramillo asked that the agency conduct a public hearing in Santa Fe on its post-Cold War philosophy on nuclear weapons, called the "Stockpile Stewardship Program." The stewardship program envisions shifting the production and recycling of pits to LANL and a national laboratory in South Carolina.

"There is substantial evidence that LANL may take on certain production roles in support of national nuclear weapons pro-

grams. This can have potentially adverse environmental impacts that would preclude positive economic development in our region and be especially harmful to our tourist industry," Jaramillo said in her letter, sent Friday.

The agency is searching for ways to streamline the production of nuclear weapons as the United States cuts its stockpile of nuclear warheads from a Cold War high of about 20,000 to about 3,500.

The agency says one possibility is to produce weapons components at the two national laboratories instead of large production plants, such as the Rocky Flats plant near Denver.

The Santa Fe City Council Wednesday began work on a resolution supporting Jaramillo's request for a public hearing.

Public hearings on the "stockpile stewardship program" already have been scheduled in Los Alamos July 11 and Albuquerque July 13.

# Mayor urges DOE to hold hearing here

By BEN NEARY  
The New Mexican

The U.S. Department of Energy should hold a hearing in Santa Fe as it prepares a study charting the future of the nation's nuclear complex, Mayor Debbie Jaramillo stated in a letter to the agency this month.

The DOE this month announced it has identified Los Alamos National Laboratory as a potential future site for production of nuclear bomb components. The agency is consolidating its nuclear programs at fewer sites nationwide.

The DOE has stated it intends to hold meetings to gather public comment on the planning document in Albuquerque and Los Alamos — both cities where it has facilities — but not in Santa Fe.

Jaramillo, in her June 23 letter to the DOE, notes that Santa Fe residents have demonstrated their interest in the future of the Los Alamos lab. She handed out a copy of a draft resolution at Wednesday's City Council meeting. If adopted by the council, the resolution would express the city's desire for the agency to hold a hearing here.

"The future of LANL is closely linked to the future of Northern

New Mexico and Santa Fe," Jaramillo wrote to Assistant Secretary Tara O'Toole. "Possible environmental impacts and economic impacts from LANL directly affect the environment and economy of Santa Fe."

City Councilor Steven Farber noted at Wednesday's council meeting that Jaramillo — who has on occasion been criticized for being less than supportive of Santa Fe's tourist economy — stated in her letter that if Los Alamos takes over a weapons production role, it could be especially harmful to the region's tourist industry.

Mary Riseley, co-director of the Los Alamos Study Group — concerned citizens who monitor lab activities — said Wednesday the group is glad the mayor has called for a meeting here. She said Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety, in particular, has worked hard to bring this matter to the city's attention.

The pending DOE study will look at the environmental, cultural and social costs of various agency alternatives for the future of the nation's weapons complex, Riseley said.

She said the study group and CCNS believe the agency should hold a hearing in Santa Fe.

6-29-95 NM

6-29-95 JN

## Santa Fe Worried About Impact Of Lab Nuclear Work

SANTA FE (AP) — Santa Fe Mayor Debbie Jaramillo wants the Department of Energy to hold a public hearing in that city as the agency works on the future of the nation's nuclear weapons program.

Jaramillo made the request this month in a letter to DOE Assistant Secretary Tara O'Toole.

The DOE has identified Los Alamos National Laboratory as a potential future site for production of nuclear bomb components and Jaramillo in her letter noted Santa Fe's proximity to the laboratory.

"The future of LANL is closely linked to the future of northern New Mexico and Santa Fe," Jaramillo wrote. "Possible environmental impacts and economic impacts from LANL directly affect the environment and economy of Santa Fe."

The DOE plans to hold meetings in Albuquerque and Los Alamos.

Mary Riseley, co-director of the Los Alamos Study Group — a citizens group that monitors lab activities — endorsed Jaramillo's request.

"We think the effects on tourism, property values and the lives of this region will be gravely affected if Los Alamos becomes a bomb factory," she said.

# Public to discuss LANL's future

8/01/95

## The New Mexican

Santa Fe city government is sponsoring a workshop and public hearing on the future of the U.S. nuclear weapons complex.

The city intends the meeting, scheduled for Saturday, to give the public an opportunity to comment on a U.S. Department of Energy plan that could turn Los Alamos National Laboratory into a nuclear bomb-making center in the 21st century.

Although the DOE — the par-

ent agency of the Los Alamos lab — has held meetings on the plan in Los Alamos and Albuquerque, it declined Mayor Debbie Jaramillo's request to hold a meeting here.

The agency stated that there is no DOE facility in Santa Fe.

The lab traditionally has been a nuclear weapons research facility.

Production work involves the handling of greater amounts of nuclear materials and therefore poses a greater threat to workers

and the environment.

The meeting will be divided into two parts: a morning session devoted to educating the public about the DOE's plan and an afternoon public comment session.

The meeting will be videotaped and all the comments will be forwarded to the DOE, said Peggy Prince of the Los Alamos Study Group, a Santa Fe citizens organization.

The hearing is scheduled to be held in the City Council Cham-

bers from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The afternoon session, from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. will be broadcast live on Public Education/Government Channel 6 on the local cable television system.

The morning session has been reserved for an informational workshop by DOE officials and the afternoon session will be reserved for public comment.

For more information, contact the Los Alamos Study group at 982-7747 or the Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety at 983-1976.

# Leaders, public share ideas on lab

By SHARYN OBSATZ  
The New Mexican

On the eve of the 50th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Santa Fe's mayor and city councilor gave speeches Saturday urging Los Alamos National Laboratories not to start building "weapons of destruction" again.

"There are a number of people in this community who do not support jobs that lead to the death of people," City Councilor

Steven Farber said during a press conference. The lab and the federal government should refocus money and employees on cleaning up the environment and promoting the Earth's "well being," he said.

Farber's speech was part of an all-day hearing at City Hall sponsored by the city and U.S. Rep. Bill Richardson as a way to make some local residents' opinions heard by the U.S. Department of Energy.

The department is studying the impact of expanding the Los Alamos

lab's role in testing and rebuilding stockpiled nuclear weapons. The agency held hearings in Albuquerque and Los Alamos but not in Santa Fe.

About 100 people attended Saturday's session, which was led by members of the Los Alamos Study Group, a watchdog group that tracks activities at the lab.

Most opposed the idea of the lab taking over much of the stewardship and maintenance of the country's nuclear arsenal, which could also allow the lab to build new weapons. They argued that

the expansion would result in more environmental risks, including the shipping of radioactive material through Northern New Mexico.

"Congress is making all these decisions right now. They're going straight ahead as fast as possible," Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group said.

A videotape of comments from the hearing will be sent to the Department of Energy.

Protesters speaking against the plan are trying to "give the Department (of Energy) the

backbone it needs to stand up to the Pentagon," Mello said.

But George Chandler, one of several lab employees who support the plan, argued that Saturday's hearing wasn't a fair public hearing because the Los Alamos Study Group decided Santa Feans would speak first, skipping over people from Los Alamos who wanted to argue in support of the plan.

"We are not outlaws," said Chandler, a physicist in the lab's

Please see LAB, Page B-4

## LAB

Continued from Page B-1

weapon testing division. "We are doing a job that is mandated by the federal government."

He said the government will transfer the nuclear stockpile program somewhere, so it's better to have it at LANL, where it will create a more stable job situation at a laboratory that faces job cutbacks and uncertainty.

More than 2,000 people in Santa Fe County work for the lab and its contractors, earning more than \$90 million per year, he said.

But Santa Fe mayor Debbie Jaramillo argued that "economic development is not a numbers game."

"It's about the quality of jobs,"

Jaramillo said during a break in the hearing.

She said in her speech that the lab will stay "culturally isolated" if it focuses only on designing and building bombs. The lab should shift to research on environmental restoration, arms control and technology transfer, she said.

It also should employ more Hispanics and people of color in management positions, Jaramillo said.

"I'd like to see Los Alamos become not an island of paranoia and privilege," she said, "but a place of hope and opportunity for people of Northern New Mexico, for their children and for the world."

## SECTION B



Mayor Debbie Jaramillo



# Santa Fe mayor calls Los Alamos 'island of paranoia and privilege'

LA Monitor  
8/7/95

By STEPHEN T. SHANKLAND  
Assistant Managing Editor

SANTA FE — Santa Fe Mayor Debbie Jaramillo called upon Los Alamos National Laboratory Saturday to redirect its mission away from nuclear weapons work and toward cleanup.

Jaramillo, calling the lab "an island of paranoia and privilege," said if LANL doesn't change its mission, it "will continue to be culturally and economically isolated" from the rest of northern New Mexico. This "cultural threat" is just as bad as the environmental threat posed by LANL "seeking the primary role" in the future nuclear weapons production complex, she said.

With the Cold War over, LANL is at a crossroads, she said. It should choose good work for the future:

technology transfer, environmental technology, arms control and non-proliferation, and cleanup of the "environmental catastrophe" left from the last five decades of lab activity. Jaramillo spoke at a Santa Fe meeting to gather public comment on the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) for Stockpile Stewardship and Management, a document that addresses the environmental effects of the future Department of Energy nuclear weapons complex. Under the plan, LANL could get responsibility for building and recycling pits, the plutonium core of nuclear weapons, as well as several other nuclear weapon parts. In addition to these production duties, the lab could get facilities to assure scien-

(Please see MAYOR, Page A-2

## MAYOR

(from Page A-1)

tifically the safety and readiness of the nuclear stockpile.

DOE held scoping meetings on the PEIS in Albuquerque and Los Alamos, but declined a request for a Santa Fe meeting. DOE said it would hold a public meeting in Santa Fe further along in the PEIS process. However, the Santa Fe City Council, along with Rep. Bill Richardson, D-N.M., took matters into their own hands and sponsored a Santa Fe meeting that was organized by the Los Alamos Study Group and other activists. Comments from the Santa Fe meeting will be submitted to DOE. Santa Fe residents weren't given the opportunity to give their opinions on the future of LANL, Jaramillo said at a news conference that preceded a public comment period. But "DOE's non-interest in holding a hearing here doesn't surprise me," she said.

The Santa Fe City Council on July 12 passed a resolution calling on DOE to hold a Santa Fe meeting.

The resolution stated that LANL "has been generally isolated (a) culturally, with to-date limited opportunities for the advancement of minorities into senior management positions; (b) economically, with lit-

tle evidence of major economic development in the region centered on laboratory activities and without the benefit of gross receipts taxes paid to the state of New Mexico; and (c) in environmental compliance, with an institutional record of chronic non-compliance with major environmental laws." The resolution also called for a "comprehensive national programmatic review of the future nuclear weapons complex in which LANL will inevitably be a central facility."

At the public hearing that took place Saturday afternoon, some Los Alamos residents at the meeting objected to the meeting protocol. Los Alamos Municipal Judge George Chandler, a LANL physicist, accused meeting organizers of being "a bunch of damned hypocrites" when they said non-Santa Feans would have to wait until Santa Fe speakers had spoken. Los Alamos residents already had an opportunity at the Los Alamos meeting, said Peggy Prince of the Santa Fe-based Los Alamos Study Group, which organized the meeting.

Chandler said that the activists complain they are shut out of the process, but when they have control of a meeting, "The first thing you do is shut down opposing voices."

Several Los Alamos residents in the audience applauded his remarks. Chandler also asked if Richardson endorsed the policy. But the organizers held firm, and the meeting went on. Jaramillo wasn't the only Santa Fe city government representative to speak at the event.

"We need to stop nuclear weapons production," said Santa Fe City Councilor Steven Farber at the news conference. "We need to redirect the government money spent in the nuclear weapons cycle to environmental issues." Also at the news

conference, Dr. Dan Kerlinsky, president of the New Mexico chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility, said that DOE's Science-Based Stockpile Stewardship Program will bring improved weapons design skills to the nuclear weapons complex. "Each facility makes it easier for scientists to design a new nuclear weapon," he said. Fifty years of the nuclear arms race is enough, Kerlinsky said. "It's time to put these weapons away and shut down the enterprise for keeping these weapons around," he said. In the future, he said, humanity shouldn't have to ask itself, "Why didn't we stop the arms race when we had a chance?"

# Council hits back at SF mayor

By **CHARMIAN SCHALLER**  
**Monitor Managing Editor**

Chris Chandler of the Responsible Environmental Action League came to the County Council Monday to protest the handling of a meeting and news conference in Santa Fe Saturday — a meeting at which Santa Fe Mayor Debbie Jaramillo called Los Alamos an “island of paranoia and privilege.”

The meeting, sponsored by the Santa Fe City Council and Rep. Bill Richardson, D-N.M., was arranged because the Department of Energy declined to hold a scoping meeting in Santa Fe on the Stockpile Stewardship and Management Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for the future nuclear weapons complex.

Meetings had been conducted by the DOE in June in Los Alamos and Albuquerque.

Reporting on the Santa Fe meeting during the “public comment” portion of the Los Alamos County

Council meeting Monday, Chandler said, “There was supposed to be a public meeting there,” and Richardson’s office said people would get equal time.

But, she said, Los Alamos people were forced to wait until the very end of the meeting and to speak last. They confronted a “stacked deck,” she said.

The moderator of the meeting was Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group (a Santa Fe anti-nuclear group), she said. Jay Coughlin of the Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety (another anti-nuclear group) and representatives of the Physicians for Social Responsibility in Albuquerque were deeply involved as well.

Chandler has written a letter of protest to Richardson. She said she doesn’t think he understood just who was organizing the meeting and how it would be run.

(Please see COUNCIL, Page 8)

## COUNCIL

(from Page 1)

She also has written letters to the Santa Fe New Mexican and Journal North.

She said when she protested, Mello and Mary Riseley of the Study Group said, “We HAD our meeting.” But, Chandler noted, the meeting in Los Alamos was run by the DOE, and everyone had an equal opportunity to speak.

Chandler suggested that it would be appropriate for the Los Alamos County Council as well as her group to write to Richardson.

She said many people from Los Alamos left before they had they had an opportunity to speak in Santa Fe. Those who stayed, she said, had to sit through a series of choreographed “anti-nuclear harangues” by people organized and invited by LASG and CCNS.

The Los Alamos County Council indicated strong support for Chandler.

Council Chairman Lawry Mann said the council already has tried unsuccessfully to get Richardson and will keep trying — notably through its two Democratic members, Vice Chairwoman Ginger Welch and Councilor Denise Smith. He said the council is “developing a counter attack.”

Welch commented that she recently attended a technology transfer meeting at which four people from Santa Fe virtually dominated discussion, insisting that Los Alamos National Laboratory devote more attention to technology for Santa Fe. Now, she said, it appears that Richardson has signed a CCNS-written resolution sharply critical of LANL and a resolution supportive of the LASG position on sharing of a public opinion wall at the Bradbury Science Museum.

Smith thanked Chandler for attending the Santa Fe meeting. She said she understands how frustrating it is to be denied the opportunity to speak, and she said it is interesting to see that these groups are so manipulative when they are running a meeting. Such an approach, she said, is the “antithesis of democracy.”

Speaking in the context of Jaramillo’s remarks about Los Alamos,

Smith said, “We as a community have worked very, very hard to bring together the communities of Northern New Mexico,” especially Española, Taos and the pueblos. We have “looked for common ground,” she said.

It is “unfortunate,” she said, that the mayor of Santa Fe doesn’t share the vision of a northern New Mexico that works together for mutual benefit.

It appears, she said, that it is Santa Fe that has become “elitist,” declining to reach out or share its wealth with other communities.

Councilor Morris Pongratz also thanked Chandler for her efforts “to set the record straight,” commenting, “That’s very hard to do.”

Pongratz said some people in Santa Fe are “using Brown Shirt (Nazi) tactics” in an effort to control public opinion. But, he said, it is important to remember that, “There are a lot of good people in Santa Fe.”

Councilor Jim Greenwood thanked Chris, commenting that he saw the announcement of the meeting and thought, “My God. I just can’t stand another one of these beat ‘em up meetings.”

He said Santa Fe reaps millions of dollars from the laboratory, an impact that rivals tourism in the Santa Fe economy. And, he said, tourism pays low wages compared to LANL, the employer of many people who live in Santa Fe or shop there.

He said he doesn’t understand why Jaramillo and others are ignoring LANL’s impact. He said their approach shows “ignorance” and “arrogance.”

# OPINIONS

4 Wednesday, August 9, 1995

Los Alamos Monitor

It dares  
to hurt it  
that few  
ial critic  
(7-1966)

## Guest Column

# Addressing the Santa Fe resolution

• Following is a response to the resolution passed by the Santa Fe City Council: "Supporting Programmatic Review of the Future Nuclear Weapons Complex

The response was written by Chris and George Chandler of Los Alamos and was forwarded to the Department of Energy.

.....

We have no quarrel with a sincere desire on the part of the City Council and the people of Santa Fe to have a PEIS public comment meeting in Santa Fe. We encourage the DOE to hold such a meeting, and would be happy to attend ourselves, as we enjoy visiting Santa Fe and discussing the Laboratory and its mission and accomplishments. We are alarmed, however, at the tone of the resolution that was passed by the City Council; we believe we know the genesis of the language in the resolution, and we hope that it does not express the genuine feelings of the people of Santa Fe.

There was public testimony at a DOE meeting in Santa Fe on Thursday July 27 by a member of the Los Alamos Study Group (LASG), that the resolution was written by a member of the closely allied Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety (CCNS), Jay Coghlin. Newspaper reports stated it was introduced at a Council meeting by Mayor Debbie Jaramillo, and passed two weeks later. The points made in the resolution about LANL and Los Alamos are typical of the CCNS and LASG, and of Mr. Coghlin: exaggerations, misrepresentations, and raising false fears to exploit public responses in furtherance of a private agenda. We wish to challenge several statements in the resolution.

*"Whereas LANL has been generally isolated (a) culturally, with to-date limited opportunities for the advancement of minorities into senior management positions..."*

The LANL is easily the least culturally isolated component of Northern New Mexico. LANL scientists are on the road continually engaging in discourse with other scientists in nations the world over on the entire spectrum of scientific activity, and are engaged in national and international political activity as well. LANL scientists are involved in negotiations on the nuclear weapons treaties, and in advising government agencies, the Congress, the United Nations, and the President on all science policy, not just nuclear weapons. LANL scientists also do much research in New Mexico in environmental monitoring, geology, and alternate energy.

LANL draws students at all levels, of all races, from all over the nation to Los Alamos to do research, to study, and to contribute to a cosmopolitan atmosphere in Los Alamos and Santa Fe. LANL supports legions of college students from Northern New Mexico with summer and holiday employment. LANL has outreach programs that puts scientists into New Mexico high schools and colleges, and that brings New Mexico science

8/9/95

teachers into Los Alamos on sabbatical.

The citizens of Los Alamos support with their time and money the great cultural institutions of Northern New Mexico including the Santa Fe Opera, the Santa Fe Symphony, the Spanish and Indian arts and crafts markets, and our population includes a large number of artists who supply and enlarge those markets. We are active as volunteers in charitable and social service work in many areas of Northern New Mexico.

The Laboratory has an aggressive minority recruitment and affirmative action program that has withstood court challenges and scrutiny by state and federal agencies. Minorities are represented in all levels of LANL to at least the levels of their statistical representation in the eligible technical population, and usually above that. This statement authored by CCNS is meant to create hostility to Los Alamos by drawing a negative image based on a false stereotype.

*"... (b) economically, with little evidence of major economic development in the region centered on laboratory activities and without the benefit of gross receipts taxes paid to the state of New Mexico..."* LANL with its contractors is the second largest employer in Santa Fe County, with over 2,000 employees. The salaries paid to Santa Fe residents are estimated at around \$90 million a year. Los Alamos has been a major driver in economic development planning for Northern New Mexico, through the Community Council and as a major player in TRADE, the Santa Fe - Los Alamos - Espanola cooperative economic-development effort. LANL's tech transfer and spin-off programs have contributed to or created many businesses in New Mexico. LANL does not pay gross receipts tax because of state and federal laws. LANL's employees pay income and property taxes in the millions of dollars, and LANL's contractors pay millions of dollars in gross receipts taxes in Los Alamos, Santa Fe, and Albuquerque.

*"... (c) in environmental compliance, with an institutional record of chronic non-compliance with major environmental laws..."* LANL's record of protecting its neighborhood from contamination is outstanding. LANL has at times been technically out of compliance with environmental laws. In some instances this has been the result of disputes with the regulating agency over the interpretation of the laws or the means to monitor compliance; LANL scientists are technologically often ahead of the regulators and prefer to use better means than are available to general industry. In some cases technology or politics (WIPP) hasn't caught up with the regulations, or regulations change suddenly, and compliance is simply not possible, and LANL sometimes pays fines, especially to the state. The Tiger Team visit in 1991 after an exhaustive and critical survey found no environmental deficiencies that could be considered an immediate danger to worker or public health and safety. The

Laboratory has an extensive monitoring and control program to guarantee that this condition continues.

**The closest areas to LANL, the first stops downstream and downwind, are neighborhoods in Los Alamos, inhabited by the families of the scientists, engineers, and technicians who operate the Laboratory. The demand for real estate downstream and downwind of the laboratory continues at unprecedented high levels.**

*"Whereas, the future benefits to Northern New Mexico are uncertain..."* It may be true that the future of the LANL is uncertain, but the goal of the CCNS and LASG is to hasten the demise. This argument is meant to frighten and recruit Santa Fe into contributing to the demise. A more enlightened policy would be to encourage the continuation of a clean, high-paying, high-tech industry in Northern New Mexico by asking the DOE to consolidate as much of the nuclear weapons complex as possible in Los Alamos, ensuring a stable laboratory and employment base for as long as nuclear weapons are a part of international politics, which will likely be a very long time. Consider the enormous effort the City of Santa Fe put forth to bring Nambe Mills to Santa Fe, to create, as we recall, fewer than 200 jobs that probably averaged around \$10 an hour. It would take 15 or 20 plants of that size to replace the employment income that LANL brings to Santa Fe.

To further illustrate the private agenda that the Santa Fe City Council has adopted, look at Sections 2 & 3 of the body of the resolution: *"...calls on the DOE to delay decisions regarding future production activities ... & ... formally subordinate decisions to be made in on-going LANL site-wide and project specific reviews to programmatic review..."* This is the LASG and CCNS anti-nuclear agenda: to create as much delay in the DARHT (the "project-specific review") EIS, Programmatic EIS, and site-wide EIS processes as possible. Why would Santa Fe care about that? I wonder if anybody on the City Council really understood what they were voting on here, or did they just succumb to pressure from political supporters?

In conclusion, let us express our sorrow at the breach that has been created between the people of Santa Fe and the people of Los Alamos by this action. We believe it was caused by the fanaticism of those well-meaning activists at LASG and CCNS who seem to care nothing for the relations between neighbors in Northern New Mexico, who apparently believe that their "noble purpose" justifies any tactic: in the single-minded pursuit of "peace," the truth and neighborly relations are unfortunate victims. We sincerely believe that the people of Santa Fe will not indulge these naive stereotypes and ugly misrepresentations about Los Alamos, and we hope their representatives on the City Council will look more closely the next time the LASG and CCNS drop an innocent-looking resolution on their political doorstep.

New Mexican 8-9-95

# Lab employees say hearing on LANL one-sided

By KATHLEENE PARKER  
For The New Mexican

LOS ALAMOS — Two Los Alamos residents are criticizing a public hearing — held in Santa Fe — on the impact of Los Alamos lab's role in testing and rebuilding nuclear weapons.

The two, both employees of Los Alamos National Laboratory, earlier announced they were forming a group, the Responsible Environmental Action League, to counter anti-lab bias.

The Santa Fe hearing was convened, in part by Rep. Bill Richardson, in response to criticism by Santa Feans, including Mayor Debbie Jaramillo, of the Department of Energy for holding hearings in Los Alamos and Albuquerque but not Santa Fe.

In a letter sent to Richardson and released to the news media, Christine and George Chandler criticized the Aug. 5 hearing at City Hall as being too closely aligned with and controlled by Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety and the Los Alamos Study Group, known for their anti-nuclear stance.

The Chandlers equated the format of the hearing with censorship, saying that Los Alamos residents were forced to wait until after Santa Fe residents for a chance to speak, in some cases a wait of six hours.

"The long delay and hostile environment drove many Los Alamos people from the meeting," the Chandlers wrote. "Everyone in the room with differing views

felt the bias of those moderating and suffered under the chilling effect of those in control who were hostile to their positions." George Chandler, a physicist in the lab's weapons-testing division, voiced similar concerns during the hearing.

But Mary Risely of the study group said the Chandlers' claims are nonsense.

"The fact is that every person who signed up from Los Alamos got a chance to speak and that meant two people from Santa Fe did not ... because there wasn't time," she said. The purpose of the meeting was to hear from Santa Fe residents — Los Alamos had already had its own hearings, she said.

In a phone interview, Richardson said if he had known what the format would be he would not have sponsored the meeting. He shares concerns about a lack of balance, he said.

"I feel both the city (of Santa Fe) and my office should have been more cognizant of the need for balance," he said. "But on the other hand, I think Los Alamos needs to justify its existence. I think they should take the heat like anyone else."

The Chandlers criticized Richardson.

"It appears to us that you have decided to involve yourself in propagating divisive stereotypes about Los Alamos by allying yourself with the anti-nuclear efforts to slander Los Alamos and close the laboratory," they wrote.

LA Monitor 8-20-95

# Distressing hyperbole

Editor:

I've read with despair the hyperbolic letters about Santa Fe activists. Might we not sort them out?

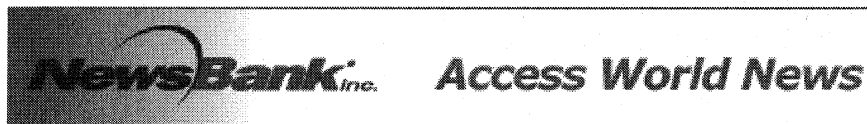
Our mayor is feisty; I think I would enjoy her outspokenness even if I were the brunt of it, but I understand those who might not enjoy it.

CCNS is, as I understand it, an organization mainly dedicated to environmental and health issues that result from nuclear work.

The Los Alamos Study Group is opposed to the manufacture and threatened use of nuclear weapons, just as most of the world opposes chemical and biological weapons. Nuclear weapons seem to me the worst of the lot because they inevitably devastate large civilian populations (including, possibly, innocent neighboring populations), and because they afflict the environment (including the environment of Los Alamos itself). The group's leadership, and much of its membership, are Buddhists and Quakers — peaceful persuasions. The style of the Study Group is intended, as Quakers say, "to speak truth to power." The Group — and I suppose all of Santa Fe — certainly does not "hate" Los Alamos, and in point of fact is not even in favor of the elimination of the lab: we desperately need our best scientific minds here working on, for example, new methods of environmental restoration. LASG supports a green lab and tech transfer. We also support increasing the lab's involvement in tracking, securing and safeguarding fissile materials worldwide. We look to you for visions of a peaceful and productive future.

These are vital issues of our time. We need to be thinking and talking about them. What an unutterable waste of time, paper and talent have been letters that are — it seems to me — resistances to substantive dialogue.

**Karin Salzmann**  
1800 Camino Corrales  
Santa Fe, N.M. 87505



**Paper: Santa Fe New Mexican, The (NM)**

**Title: MAIN**

**Date: January 25, 1996**

Los Alamos National Laboratory is a potential site for almost all aspects of bomb production work in the scaled down nuclear weapons complex planned for the 21st century, according to a report released Wednesday by the Department of Energy.

The "Implementation Plan" identifies Los Alamos as one of two sites under consideration for work the laboratory has not performed since the 1950s: building plutonium cores for bombs in the nuclear arsenal.

The other possible site is the DOE's Savannah River plant in South Carolina.

Los Alamos is one of three sites under review for the manufacture of another key nuclear weapon part for stockpile bombs: "secondaries," which contain uranium.

The other sites under consideration are Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California and the Oak Ridge facility in Tennessee. Oak Ridge is where most of the DOE's weapons-related uranium work has been centered in the past.

Los Alamos and Sandia National Laboratories in Albuquerque are both candidates to build non-nuclear components that contain high explosives.

The lab may also be called on to examine plutonium cores -- called "pits" -- in existing weapons to ensure they are still sound.

Additionally, the plan says that above-ground nuclear testing facilities -- some of which could be at Los Alamos -- could take the place of full-scale underground nuclear tests, which have been banned since 1992.

At Los Alamos, such facilities include the partially constructed Dual-Axis Radiographic Hydrotest Facility, which is tied up in the courts because of a challenge by two Santa Fe activist groups, and the not-yet-built Atlas Facility, which would look at radiation and aging effects on existing stockpile weapons.

The plan rejects other possible approaches to the handling of the nuclear arsenal in the 21st century, including dismantling it altogether, restoring it to its Cold War proportions, or simply performing maintenance work as bomb parts age.

The plan provides the most detailed picture yet of what Los Alamos' role would be in a future nuclear weapons production complex. The DOE is expected to release a "draft environmental impact statement" in coming weeks that should provide greater clarity about the roles DOE is proposing for Los Alamos.

The implementation plan was blasted by a local activist.

"This document is an elaborate rationalization for an illogical and incredible continuation of nuclear pork throughout the country," said Greg Mello of the **Los Alamos Study Group**.

Last year, John Immele, program director for nuclear weapons technology at the lab, said the lab was "looking forward to playing a role in a smaller (nuclear weapons) complex."

Immele said maintaining the "capability for small lot fabrication" at Los Alamos would reduce the nuclear danger by maintaining the deterrent value of the U.S. arsenal.

At the same time, he said such an approach "may be the most inexpensive way to go" and "might be the best thing for the country."

It has long been suspected that Los Alamos might take on plutonium production responsibilities since it is the only place still operating in the country with the capability to build significant numbers of pits.

It has been less clear that other work, such as manufacturing uranium secondaries, might also be centered at the lab.

The plan does not specify how many plutonium pits the lab would be expected to build annually. Both lab and

DOE officials have said publicly in the past year that a probable number is about 50 pits per year. This compares with the more than 1,000 pits a year that used to be built at the Rocky Flats plant near Denver.

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*Author: Keith Easthouse*

*Section: MAIN*

*Page: A-1*

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# LANL to get \$300 million for upgrades

2/29/96

By KEITH EASTHOUSE  
The New Mexican

**Energy Secretary  
Hazel O'Leary said  
the plan could  
provide employment  
for as many as 275  
workers.**

WASHINGTON — The Department of Energy plans to pump \$300 million into facility upgrades at Los Alamos National Laboratory from 1998 to 2005 as part of its new approach of managing the nation's existing nuclear stockpile, rather than building new weapons.

The plan, which is in draft form, could provide employment for as many as 275 workers at the lab, Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary said at a news conference Wednesday.

The new plan, known as "stockpile stewardship," requires department officials to monitor the existing nuclear arsenal and provide upgrades when necessary. President Clinton's decision to halt production of new weapons and ban all nuclear testing forced the DOE to adopt this approach.

The department will rely on Los Alamos to do work that used to be performed at the Rocky Flats facility near Denver: build-

ing plutonium cores, or "pits," for weapons in the nuclear stockpile.

Previously, Los Alamos has built small numbers of pits each year, but only for experimental purposes.

According to lab officials, there is some uncertainty about how many pits the lab will be required to build each year as it replaces aging components in existing weapons.

Estimates range from 20 to 80 per year, with 50 being the most likely number. That would provide employment for 150 workers, according to Tim Neal, program manager for materials and

Please see LANL, Page B-3

## LANL

Continued from Page B-1

process technologies at the lab.

In the event of a worsening of international tensions or a discovery of a serious flaw in an existing weapons system, the lab might be called on to build up to 80 pits per year, providing employment to 260 workers, Neal said.

Neal said such a production level would be the maximum the lab could handle, even with the planned upgrades to facilities.

Most of the production-related positions would be filled by existing employees shifted from other work, Neal said. There will be some "new hires," however.

Los Alamos will also be home to a \$48 million weapons testing facility called Atlas under the plan unveiled by O'Leary. An-

other 15 jobs would be required to operate the Atlas facility, according to the DOE.

The \$300 million for Los Alamos represents the lion's share of the \$500 million the DOE plans to spend for upgrades at all its sites.

However, T.J. Trapp, acting deputy program director for nuclear materials and stockpile management at the lab, said half of that money will be spent on upgrades that would have to have been performed whether or not pit fabrication responsibilities had been handed to Los Alamos.

About \$100 million will go toward remodeling a wing at Technical Area 55, the lab's plutonium facility, according to the DOE plan.

The remaining \$50 million will be spent on equipment related to

supporting the fabrication work. This pot of money might also be used to redo two wings of another facility; the Chemical and Metallurgical Research building, Trapp said.

Last June, it looked as if all aspects of nuclear weapons production work might be handed to Los Alamos. But even though it appears the lab's role will be limited to plutonium work, the change still promises to be controversial.

Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group, a Santa Fe organization, said the DOE's plan was a "triumph for the plutonium priesthood at LANL."

Public hearings on the plan are scheduled for March 26 at Los Alamos and April 23 in Santa Fe.

Paul Kane of States News Service contributed to this report.



# Date--02/29/1996 Edition--Journal North Page-- 1

## LANL'S NUCLEAR WORK TO EXPAND

**Richard Parker Journal Washington Bureau**

WASHINGTON -- Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary on Wednesday made it official: She wants Los Alamos National Laboratory to make replacement triggers for nuclear warheads as the rest of the country's weapons complex shrinks.

O'Leary made the announcement -- long anticipated in New Mexico and in arms control circles -- as she unveiled the future shape of the complex that manufactures and maintains the country's nuclear weapons.

The plan involves consolidating the complex to eight sites, from a high in the late 1980s of 11, in direct response to drives toward broader arms control. The Senate passed the START II agreement in January, and the Clinton administration, having adopted a test ban, is pressing other governments to agree to a global Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

The Energy Department, O'Leary said Wednesday, would help fulfill the test ban "while maintaining an effective, reliable -- but safe -- nuclear deterrent."

Defense spending on nuclear weapons maintenance has fallen from \$2.5 billion in 1985 to \$1.5 billion this year. The new plan projects that annual spending will fall to \$1 billion by 2005. Before the turn of the century, O'Leary said, the department plans to begin disposing of weapons-grade plutonium by burning it in reactors, sealing it in ceramics or burying it deep beneath the earth's surface.

Eight sites around the country will play a greater role in maintaining the nuclear deterrent, and that includes weapons laboratories in New Mexico. The role of weapons laboratories has grown with the ban on below-ground testing in Nevada. Instead, simulations and studies of weapons cores are used to study their reliability.

Los Alamos would be responsible for small-scale production of plutonium pits, the triggers in a warhead.

"It's a small capability for pit manufacturing," said Steve Guidice, an assistant manager of the DOE's Albuquerque Operations Office, who headed the restructuring of the weapons complex. "But it's an essential capability we need to be able to protect."

Department officials emphasized that the triggers -- grapefruit-size plutonium spheres -- are intended as replacement parts for the existing arsenal.

The government will spend \$520 million on defense programs at Los Alamos this year. DOE would begin to move its pit manufacturing to Los Alamos beginning in 1998, adding 260 workers to the 3,200 dedicated to defense work at the lab.

Lab spokesman Jim Danneskiold said the department's job estimates are inflated. He said pit production should require between 90 and 150 jobs a year depending on the number produced. He said the lab would need 260 workers only in case of a national emergency.

Anti-nuclear activists in Santa Fe decried the department's decision to do production work at the Los

Alamos lab.

"We're literally seeing the lab returning to its roots, and those roots are nuclear weapons programs," said Jay Coghlin of Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety. "These decisions are predetermining and fixing LANL's future. It's a future that won't be to the broader benefit of northern New Mexico."

Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group said he feared the proposed pit production at Los Alamos could open the door to the production of new nuclear weapons.

Pit production "will certainly increase the capacity for plutonium handling. Therefore, it is likely to carry with it increased waste generation and the potential for accidents," Mello said.

He said it would be the first time since the 1950s that Los Alamos has been involved in manufacturing a key element of nuclear weapons.

Danneskiold said the lab makes about one dozen pits a year for research and development purposes. He said its new role will not mean a substantial increase in what the lab is doing.

While the department considered other sites for making the pits, it concluded that Los Alamos was its best choice because it already has the ability. During the 1980s, the lab manufactured pits during breakdowns at the Rocky Flats, Colo., weapons plant.

Assistant DOE Secretary Victor Reis said the pits at Los Alamos would be dry-machined, avoiding one of the many environmental problems that eventually led to Rocky Flats' closure.

The department estimated Los Alamos would make as many as 50 a year -- far fewer than previous estimates -- to replace aging triggers or those removed from missiles for sampling.

The number of pits is so small that department officials said the Los Alamos project is intended primarily to preserve the U.S. ability to make the triggers if a crisis should arise. They estimated that they would have about five years to launch a larger pit-making enterprise, possibly elsewhere, if necessary.

The reorganization also will lead to the construction at Los Alamos of Atlas, a pulsed-power machine used to measure the initial dynamics of a nuclear explosion. The data would be used in computer simulations of a full blast. Anti-nuclear activists have charged that the United States is, in principle, violating its test-ban right by modeling the effects of nuclear detonations.

No change is expected at Sandia National Laboratories as a result of Wednesday's announcement.

And the department does not plan to store plutonium from old weapons at the Manzano storage area near Kirtland Air Force Base. Manzano was rejected, in part, because of its proximity to Albuquerque.

The department also is weighing the possibility of making high-explosive components for weapons at Los Alamos; they now are made near Amarillo.

The department's plan does not reduce the role of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, as a previous independent panel of experts suggested. The department plan concludes that the test ban means weapons labs will be even more central in ensuring that weapons are reliable.

Publication: Jnl Legacy 1995 to July 2005; Date: Feb 29, 1996; Section: Final<; Page: 2



## Date--02/29/1996 Edition--Final Page--A1

### LANL'S N-WORK EXPANDS

Richard Parker Journal Washington Bureau

#### LAB TOLD TO MAKE WARHEAD TRIGGERS

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OTHER VOICES

# Nuclear Mafia Remains Active

By GREG MELLO

The Cold War is over, right? Nuclear stockpiles in the U.S. and Russia will soon decline to 3,500 weapons each, and further declines are expected. A comprehensive test ban is imminent. The labs have stopped designing nuclear weapons and are converting to civilian and environmental research. The nuclear weapons budget is dropping, and the labs' weapons work force is shrinking.

Dream on.

Yes, the Cold War is over. But none of the rest is true. And the nuclear mafia that profited from the Cold War protection racket is actually growing, untouched by the budget battles that threaten just about everything else in government. And, with your silent permission, the nuclear gang is moving its operations more and more to a mesa near you.

We can be grateful that older weapons are being dismantled. But disarmament it ain't. Even if START II is ratified in Russia — which is doubtful right now, due in large part to U.S. violations of the 1973 ABM Treaty — the U.S. expects to keep roughly 8,500 nuclear bombs and warheads, about half ready to use and half in "reserve." Without START II, this number will be higher.

What's worse, some senators

(with bomb plants in their states) have recently begun to modernize the arsenal with new kinds of warheads.

A test ban? That's another myth. Far from having stopped their pursuits, the nuclear labs continue to develop new weapon concepts. Like the High-Powered Radio Frequency weapon, designed to use Earth's atmosphere as a powerful radio antenna in order to cripple a nation or an army by knocking out its electrical circuits at one stroke. Will it be deployed? The new Earth-Penetrator will. It's made to break hardened bunkers with a powerful nuclear-explosive shock to the earth.

Declining weapons budgets? Don't we wish! Far from declining, the bomb-builders' budget line is now rising for the second year in a row. Although weapons spending at the labs is less than it was at the peak of Reagan's apocalyptic push toward Armageddon, it is still twice, in constant dollars, what it was in 1975. According to the Brookings Institution, U.S. taxpayers have coughed up some \$4 trillion for nuclear arms.

But these first 50 years are just the beginning, according to the Department of Energy. That agency is about to embark on a multibillion-dollar long-term nuclear spending spree, centered around new "surrogate" testing devices at the labs. These machines are not necessary to maintain exist-

ing weapons. They are designed to provide the capability to design and certify new nuclear weapons, test ban or no. Politically, they are part of a pork-barrel payoff to the labs and their powerful protectors in return for support of a test ban.

One of these machines is the redundant and ill-advised DARHT (Dual Axis Radiographic Hydrodynamic Test) facility at Los Alamos. Oinking in at \$187 million, it soon will be pushed from the trough just a few years after it is finally finished by a successor machine costing 340 percent more. DARHT will explode mock warheads — some made of real plutonium, using what everyone hopes will be leakproof steel tanks.

However unlikely it may be, an accidental explosion with plutonium would be catastrophic for New Mexico, with fallout that would drift miles downwind. DOE's own analysis shows that serious radiation doses could be imparted to downwind communities in this scenario, causing fatal cancers and — they forgot to say this part — permanently contaminating many square miles of land. Even a small leak would be very serious.

Given its enormous (and almost eternal) toxicity and its potentially holocaustal role in the center of each nuclear weapon, plutonium has been aptly called "matter as darkness." Nonetheless, Los Alamos has generously offered to be the nation's plu-

tonium processing capital, taking over the grim and dirty work of making nuclear weapons cores from the now-closed Rocky Flats plant in Colorado. More than \$550 million is about to be invested in upgrading its plutonium capabilities.

In the real world, that kind of money would signal serious long-term job creation. But DOE officials make clear that few or no new jobs are to be expected from this work.

What's going on here? It's what is euphemistically called "science-based stockpile stewardship." DOE's Assistant Secretary Victor Reis explains: "The stewards really are more important than the equipment. ... The purpose of the stockpile stewardship program is in fact to maintain the stewards, and the right type of experiments." Ah yes, of course. In the final analysis, stockpile stewardship is not about scientists maintaining warheads; it's about warheads maintaining scientists.

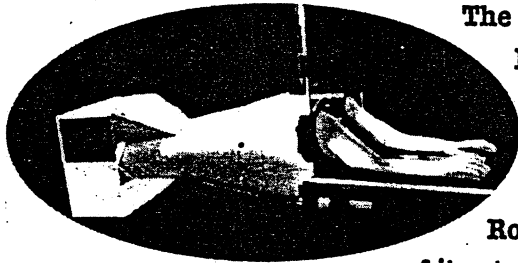
The future of the nuclear weapons complex, including Los Alamos, is the subject of a DOE hearing on Thursday at the Double-Tree Hotel (formerly the High Mesa Inn), 3347 Cerrillos Road, from 2 to 5 p.m. and 6 to 9:30 p.m. Why not come? And bring the kids. They're the ones who seem to have been left out of DOE's equation.

Greg Mello is director of the Los Alamos Study Group.

The original of this was 135% larger written by a local businessman it appeared just before the SS&H PEIS hearings in 2 papers. LANSG funded the author, helped gather sponsors, and served as a financial backer for the ad.

April 24-30, 1996

# Do You Know that Los Alamos National Laboratory will soon become the nation's only nuclear weapon plutonium facility?



Glove box for handling plutonium & the first nuclear bomb 'Little Boy'

The US Department of Energy (DOE) is planning to make Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) the nation's only facility for manufacturing plutonium weapons parts—the so-called "pits" that form the grim core of each warhead. This is the work formerly done at the Rocky Flats plant near Denver, forced to close because of its atrocious environmental, health and safety record.

## Let Your Voice Be Heard ■ Silence = Indifference

**WHAT:** The Last Public Department of Energy Hearing on the Future of Nuclear Weapons Design, Testing & Production and its Impacts on Los Alamos National Laboratory

**WHEN:** April 25, 1996 2-5 PM • 6-9:30 PM

**WHERE:** The Double Tree Hotel (formerly the High Mesa Inn) 3347 Cerrillos Road, Santa Fe, NM

**HOW:** Join As a Community to Protect Our Safety and Quality of Life

**WHY:** Health Risks • Potential Accidents & Contamination • Loss of Tourism • Lowered Real Estate Values • More Nuclear Waste • Loss of Control Over Our Futures

### SPEAK OUT FOR:

- Ending new nuclear weapons design and production;
- Eliminating the transport of nuclear materials and waste transport through our communities;
- Stopping nuclear waste dump expansion on the Pajarito Plateau;
- Redirecting LANL's resources toward leadership in civilian science and technologies, including alternative energy, medicine, environmental science, and treaty verification technologies;
- No mock nuclear plutonium explosions at DARHT
- Complete clean up of LANL's contamination of ancestral lands;
- Expanding funds for technologies for radioactive waste management locally and globally;
- Breaking the silence that supports and enables the nuclear circle of violence and intimidation; and
- Exposing the deception perpetuated by the nuclear industry under the umbrella of national security.

### JOIN THESE BUSINESSES AND INDIVIDUALS IN PROTECTING OUR COMMUNITIES!

Blue Moon Books & Vintage Video  
Catalyst Entertainment  
Kay Carlson Word Processing  
Cloud Cliff Bakery Cafe Artspace  
Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety  
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Valerie Jean Fairchild  
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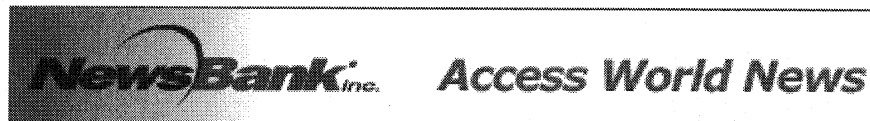
Galisteo News  
The Golden Eye  
Judy Herzl & Charles Hoy  
Alan Hutner & Elizabeth Rose  
Transitions Radio Magazine on  
KBAC FM  
Jett  
Kent Galleries/The Contemporary  
Craftsman  
Tony Kent Network Marketing  
Lucy Lippard

Los Alamos Study Group  
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Stephanie Miano  
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Pasquals  
RexRay Vision Computer Services

Second Street San Mateo Crossing  
Neighborhood Association  
Ten Thousand Waves  
THE magazine  
Morgan Thomas  
Rick Vigil Governor of Tesuque Pueblo  
Wear Abouts  
Zephyr

For additional information about this meeting, the issues or to make donations to support this ad, please call:  
Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety at 986•1973 or The Los Alamos Study Group at 982•7747





**Paper: Santa Fe New Mexican, The (NM)**  
**Title: Radioactive mishaps rising at LANL**  
**Date: July 29, 1996**

Mishaps in which workers or equipment have been contaminated with radioactive substances are on the rise at Los Alamos National Laboratory, according to a laboratory report obtained by The New Mexican.

From 1993 to 1995, the number of documented incidents of radioactive contamination across the laboratory rose 22 percent, a July 12 study called a "Summary of Radiological Incident Reports" says.

Additionally, the number of reports of contaminations at the lab's plutonium facility Technical Area 55 jumped 75 percent between 1993 and 1995, from 139 to 244, the report says.

A second laboratory report says the total amount of radiation that the entire laboratory work force was exposed to in 1995 was higher than in any other year this decade save 1990.

The 1995 "collective dose" was 43 percent greater than the target level for 1995 to which the lab committed itself when the existing management contract with the University of California was drawn up earlier this decade, according to a 29-page annual report put out by the lab's "dose optimization team."

Lab officials say the rise in radiation exposure and radioactive mishaps since 1993 has one primary cause: the Cassini project, an ongoing effort to build radioactive heat sources for deep space probes used by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

The space probes are fueled by an isotope of plutonium that is particularly difficult to handle: Plutonium-238, which is many times more radioactive than the better known Plutonium-239 used in nuclear bombs.

Lab spokesman Jim Danneskiold said the Cassini project has peaked and that therefore it is likely that contamination incidents at the lab should decrease in the near future.

A secondary factor in the increased contamination rates could be improved monitoring of radiation incidents at the lab and the lowering of the Energy Department's threshold for which some types of radioactive contamination incidents must be reported.

"In a sense, I'm happy to see (the increases) because it indicates we're doing a better job of tracking and reporting" incidents, said Joseph Graf, an official with the lab's Environmental, Safety and Health Division.

The two reports on radiological contamination come at a time of heightened concern about safety practices at the lab. Four fatal or near fatal accidents in the past 19 months contributed to lab director Sig Hecker's decision two weeks ago to temporarily halt all laboratory operations so that management and employees could review safety procedures.

That suspension of work, which for the most part has been lifted, came on the heels of a Department of Energy study that castigated laboratory management for "an inability to learn from previous incidents to prevent their recurrence." The 156-page DOE study resulted from a DOE investigation of an electrical accident in January that left a laboratory worker in a coma.

Hecker, at a news conference announcing the work suspension, pointed out that the four accidents occurred in work projects that did not involve radioactive materials. Both Hecker and Bruce Matthews, director of the Nuclear Materials Technology Division, have said over the past several months that while the lab needs to improve in the field of industrial safety, its safety procedures at facilities that handle nuclear materials are excellent.

Not everyone has been in agreement about that.

The Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, a government agency that performs technical oversight of DOE nuclear weapons facilities, said in 1994 that the radiation protection program at Technical Area 55 was only "marginally satisfactory and in need of improvement."

Danneskiold said the board gave TA-55 a much better rating last year.

Graf said the upward trend is driven primarily by two types of contamination: area contaminations and

contamination of workers' clothing.

Area contaminations include spills of radioactive materials. At TA-55, area contaminations more than doubled between 1993 and 1995 from 45 to 109 incidents.

Additionally, contamination of workers' protective clothing at TA-55 jumped 76 percent between 1993 and 1995 from 98 incidents to 173 incidents.

Graf said other types of radioactive contamination have been decreasing.

He noted that contamination of workers' nasal passages with plutonium a serious situation since uptake in the nostrils could lead to the deposition of plutonium in the lungs, where it could be deadly dropped from 11 incidents in 1993 to eight incidents last year.

There were six such incidents during the first six months of this year, however, a rate slightly ahead of the 1993 rate.

Graf also pointed out that skin contaminations at the lab dropped from 51 in 1994 to 40 in 1995.

Once again, however, the rate appears to be higher in 1996.

Over the first six months of this year, there were 29 skin contamination incidents. If that rate is maintained, it would result in more contaminations in 1996 than in 1994.

While the total number of documented contamination incidents over the first six months of this year is lagging significantly behind last year's rate, the number of more serious but not necessarily dangerous contamination incidents at TA-55 appears to be on the rise in 1996.

Through June 30 at TA-55, there were 27 such incidents described in documents called occurrence reports. That's more than took place in all of 1994 at TA-55 and is only seven less than the 34 occurrence reports issued due to mishaps at TA-55 in 1993 and 1995.

A Santa Fe activist agreed that the main reason for the increases probably is the handling of plutonium-238 necessitated by the Cassini project.

But he said a more fundamental problem is that plutonium no matter what the isotope is an inherently dangerous substance to work with.

"There is every indication that increased work with plutonium will cause increases in worker exposures and an increased danger of more widespread accidents," Greg Mello of the **Los Alamos Study Group** said.

While the Cassini project may be fading, the lab will take on increased plutonium responsibilities in coming years. The Department of Energy's new "stockpile stewardship" program calls upon the lab to build 20 to 80 plutonium pits per year beginning early next century.

Plutonium pits, grapefruit-size metal spheres, are found at the heart of nuclear bombs.

Pit manufacturing at the DOE's Rocky Flats plant near Denver led to widespread contamination of facilities, equipment, workers and the environment. Activists like Mello have raised concerns that production work at LANL will lead to similar problems. Laboratory officials dismiss that claim, saying that the scale of production planned at Los Alamos pales in comparison to the production levels at Rocky Flats which were on the order of 1,000 pits per year during the Cold War era.

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*Author: KEITH EASTHOUSE*

*Page: A1*

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# Edition--Journal North Date--11/13/1996 Page-- 1

## DOE Report Confirms LANL To Make Pits

Ian Hoffman Journal Staff Writer

Scientists at Los Alamos National Laboratory gladly ceded the lab's mantle as the nation's nuclear-weapons factory 42 years ago.

Now a key element of that role is coming back to the birthplace of the bomb for as long as the federal government foresees.

A report issued Tuesday affirmed the U.S. Department of Energy's choice of Los Alamos as the nation's only site for making plutonium pits for the U.S. stockpile.

The DOE report also recommended LANL as home to a \$43 million machine, called Atlas, that nearly recreates the pressures and temperatures within an exploding nuclear weapon to study mock-ups of bomb components.

Making the grapefruit-sized pits at Los Alamos for 25 years will cost \$1.9 billion. Anti-nuclear activists argue it also could undermine international gains in arms reduction.

Weapons scientists have differed over whether pits in the stockpile need to be replaced. Proponents suggest that decay of the old pits will cause a buildup of hydrogen and highly radioactive americium.

"They like to create this doomsday scenario of 'What if it all turned into peanut butter?' But there's no evidence it's happening," said Dr. Dan Kerlinsky of Albuquerque, a member of Physicians for Social Responsibility and a former member of a government panel that studied the DOE weapons complex.

"The main problem with the (study) is they're trying to hold in place a static notion of what the nuclear world is right now, rather than what it's going to become over the next 10 or 20 years," Kerlinsky said.

Locally, some wonder about the impact on the region's quality of life. Until 1989, the DOE made pits at Rocky Flats; it was closed in 1992 due to safety problems and massive contamination.

"We don't want what happened at Rocky Flats to happen at Los Alamos," said H.L. Daneman, a retired engineer in Santa Fe. Daneman said he worries about accidents or terrorist attacks at Los Alamos.

"Nobody wants to live by Love Canal or Three Mile Island. I would not like to see the communities around Los Alamos become stigmatized," he said.

Lab officials point out that Los Alamos always has produced plutonium pits -- for explosive tests and for predicting the effects of aging on nuclear weapons. Now, it will produce pits primarily for warheads in submarine-launched Trident missiles and in the land-based Minuteman III missile.

Under the new program, lab officials predict they will make 20 or fewer pits a year, starting in 2003 or 2004. The lab is spending at least \$115 million on renovating Technical Area 55, its plutonium facility, to handle production of up to 50 pits a year working single shifts, or 80 pits a year if technicians work around the clock.

The Atlas facility requires about 15 workers. To make 20 pits a year, the lab will need to hire 90 workers, including 40 to make the pits in glove boxes and 50 for such supporting jobs as security and radiation control, said Jim Danneskiold, a lab spokesman.

If the lab makes 50 pits a year, it will need about 155 new workers, he said.

The new program bears no comparison with Rocky Flats, where thousands of pits were produced each year, Danneskiold said.

"There were some things that were done at Rocky Flats that were just unacceptable," Danneskiold said.

The lab is developing new processes to cut down on radioactive waste and radiation exposure for workers, such as casting the pits and cleaning them without using hazardous solvents, Danneskiold said.

The Atlas facility would use an energy burst equal for an instant to the world's electrical output to compress foils and metals as large as 4 inches into the size of a checker.

Atlas, slated to start operating by 1999, is among a slew of tools that nuclear scientists say they need to see what happens within an aging nuclear weapon since they no longer can use explosive tests. Anti-nuclear activists contend that such multimillion dollar machines amount to no more than "nuclear welfare" to succor the weapons scientists whose heyday ended with the Cold War.

"The reason the labs have all this money thrown at them for dozens of duplicative new facilities is that they're cooperating in obtaining a comprehensive test ban," said Greg Mello, head of the Santa Fe-based Los Alamos Study Group. "This is a political deal. It has nothing to do with science and everything to do with a political payoff."

Mello's group is among some 40 environmental organizations that have vowed to sue to stop the stockpile stewardship and management program. They are expected to argue that the DOE failed to consider other plans seriously, especially ones that envision further arms reductions.

Steve Guidice, a DOE manager working on the stockpile stewardship and management program, said the department focused on plans that fit U.S. national security policy and were technologically feasible.

"People can suggest a lot of things, but if they're out of context with those two things, they're not really applicable. Denuclearization, for example, is not a reasonable alternative," Guidice said during a teleconference Tuesday with reporters.

The DOE believes that the program will enable it to certify to the president that the weapons stockpile is reliable, said Vic Reis, the department's assistant secretary for defense programs.

"We think we can do the job. But we can return to testing if need be and return to production if need be," Reis said.