

---

## DEFENSE BOARD RAISES QUESTIONS ABOUT CMRR-NF REDESIGN PLAN

The Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board has asked the National Nuclear Security Administration to explain changes to the design of Los Alamos National Laboratory's Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement-Nuclear Facility, questioning whether the agency is backing away from commitments made in 2009 to the DNFSB. "As part of the certification process, NNSA agreed to revise the CMRR Preliminary Documented Safety Analysis, preliminary design, and design processes to address the Board's concerns, and to implement detailed designs during the final design consistent with specific design requirements agreed to as part of the certification review," DNFSB Chairman Peter Winokur wrote in a Feb. 8 letter. "Clearly the Board's certification relied upon the future full implementation of these final design commitments by NNSA."

The 2009 review by the DNFSB was a critical milestone for the project. Congress required it, in the process giving the Safety Board unusual legal authority. Under normal conditions, the Board's role is merely advisory. But statutory language in the Fiscal Year 2009 Defense Authorization Bill placed restrictions on the NNSA's ability to spend some of its appropriation that year on the project until that review was completed. The design changes, currently being studied by the lab at the direction of NNSA but not yet approved by the agency, appear to come at least in part in response to input from a group of high-level advisors retained by Energy Secretary Steven Chu to look at the project (*NW&M Monitor*, Vol. 15 No. 1). Rising cost estimates for the project have raised eyebrows, sparking the NNSA to take another look at the standards being used to guide the design of the facility—in particular the seismic standards—and the agency's revised approach has rekindled a debate between the Board and the NNSA about the safety strategy at the facility. The most recent estimate for the facility pegs the cost between \$3.7 and \$5.8 billion.

### Info Sought on Six Potential Design Changes

In his letter, Winokur asked that the DNFSB be briefed within 30 days on six possible design changes apparently being considered, including:

- Potential elimination of fire suppression in both the long-term and day-storage vaults;
- Potential elimination of fire suppression in some glove boxes and hoods;
- Downgrading the facility's fire suppression system from "safety-class" to "safety-significant";

- Downgrading the seismic safety requirements placed on the facility's ventilation system;
- Lowering the amount of material-at-risk in the building; and
- Changes to the building's elevation.

Winokur also asked the NNSA to brief the DNFSB on revisions to the safety analysis associated with the reduction of material at risk; whether the downward changes in material-at-risk "represent a change in the laboratory mission requirements"; and whether changes to building elevation being contemplated might impact structural and seismic analysis.

### NNSA Evaluating 'Every Available Option'

NNSA spokesman Damien LaVera issued a statement saying no safety compromises would be made in the CMRR's design: "We are committed to replacing the existing CMR facility with a new, modern facility that is safer, more secure and more efficient," LaVera said. "As we proceed with the design, we will do so in a way that takes into account 21st century nuclear safety requirements and makes efficient use of the taxpayer's money. As part of that effort NNSA and Los Alamos are working to evaluate every available option. We share the DNFSB's commitment to safety, have received their request, and are working to respond within 30 days as requested."

—*Todd Jacobson and staff reports*

## WITH EXCHANGE OF INSTRUMENTS OF RATIFICATION, NEW START ENTERS FORCE

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov exchanged the instruments of ratification for the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty Feb. 5 in Munich, and as they swapped the documents, Clinton noted the symbolic nature of the exchange. The treaty's entry into force allows the two countries to renew verification and monitoring efforts with regards to their nuclear arsenals after a 15-month absence and is a centerpiece of repaired relations between the countries. "Two years ago, we all laughed about the translation of the ceremonial 'reset' button that I gave to the foreign minister in Geneva," Clinton said at the Munich Security Conference, referencing the notorious exchange with Lavrov in which 'reset' was incorrectly translated as "overcharge" onto an oversized red button. "But when it came to the translation that mattered most, our two countries, led by our two presidents, turned words into action to reach a milestone in our strategic partnership."