

Plutonium warhead factory under construction near Santa Fe

Huge expansion of nuclear weapons mission underway despite climate collapse, crying social and economic needs

Twenty-two miles from the Santa Fe Plaza, the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) has a crash program to build a plutonium processing center and nuclear weapons factory at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). Its purpose is to make plutonium warhead cores (“pits”) for a new kind of warhead for a new \$100 billion intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM).



To create the new factory LANL is remodeling its 1970s vintage plutonium facility while also constructing new infrastructure on a large scale.

Why a crash program? And why at LANL?

The answer lies in the obscene profits available from the new nuclear arms race, a perceived need to grow the U.S.

nuclear weapons complex to offset declining U.S. global power, and the constant efforts by New Mexico politicians to increase nuclear pork-barrel spending in the state – while neglecting the state’s real priorities.

Since 1989 LANL has failed four times in its attempts to build a pit factory. In 2019, the Institute for Defense Analyses warned NNSA that crash efforts are likely to fail. Even if LANL succeeds, without accidents, the program provides no additional “nuclear deterrent” value. Why?

LANL pit production has nothing to do with maintaining existing U.S. weapons

Every U.S. nuclear warhead and bomb contains a pit. These slowly age. If for some reason the U.S. is still building nuclear warheads in the late 2030s and 2040s – which we can be sure will be an era of deepening climate collapse, global famine, and other severe crises threatening the very existence of the United States – they might need new pits. At the earliest.

Until then, at least 15-25 years from now (or even longer if the U.S. stockpile shrinks), no new pits are needed. Right now, the U.S. has a gigantic arsenal of 2,000 deployed warheads with 1,800 in reserve and 1,750 retired warheads, plus about 5,600 aging but useable spare pits.

LANL facilities are old, unsafe, overcrowded and unreliable

They are so old that by the time pits are actually “needed,” LANL’s facilities will have “aged out.” A commitment to LANL pit production therefore means a commitment to another factory, beyond the one being built.



Meanwhile LANL’s production capacity is too small to support more than a fraction of today’s arsenal, even if LANL could produce pits reliably for a long time, which nobody seriously believes is possible.

The U.S. has not had a functioning pit factory since 1989. There is tremendous political pressure to build an adequate, reliable factory, beyond LANL’s jerry-rigged, temporary one. To this end NNSA is remodeling a partially-built plutonium facility in South Carolina (SC), which is large enough to make as many pits as needed without calling upon LANL for anything more than research, development, and training.

The brand-new, safer SC facility will be operating by 2035 at the latest. This is plenty soon enough to make pits – or to not make pits, the wiser choice. The SC facility is also ten times as far from surrounding communities as LANL’s factory. And unlike LANL, the SC facility is not located adjacent to powerful earthquake faults and sacred Indian lands.

As NNSA has testified, finishing the SC facility is actually faster and cheaper than trying to build a proper new plutonium facility at LANL, assuming a location for such a facility could be found – which is doubtful.

Thus, from any but the most ideological and partisan perspectives, LANL’s program is wasteful, dangerous, and destructive.

The LANL pit factory and related expansion is the costliest project in New Mexico history

Construction and startup costs for the factory lie in the \$11 billion range, far above initial estimates. Operating costs will run about \$1 billion each year. LANL pits will cost an absurd \$50 million each, at a minimum.

Preparing this factory is the most expensive construction project in the history of New Mexico, rivalling construction of all the state’s interstate highways put together.

This gigantic undertaking already employs more than 2,000 people full-time, plus hundreds of subcontract workers. When and if it starts, pit production would be a

Did You Know?

- Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) is building a factory for plutonium nuclear weapons cores (“pits”).
- It is the costliest project in the history of New Mexico.
- New pits aren’t needed for any U.S. nuclear weapon.
- LANL’s old facilities don’t meet federal safety standards.
- A new, safer pit factory is being built in South Carolina.
- The LANL factory would have huge regional impacts.

24/7 endeavor, because the LANL facilities are so crowded. Many safety issues remain unresolved. Shipping the large quantities of nuclear waste produced during production will take precedence over the removal of LANL’s extensive Cold War wastes. As a result, cleanup may never happen.

Even more nuclear weapons jobs will not benefit the region

Even after decades of rising lab budgets coupled with falling economic and social performance relative to other states, many people in New Mexico still “look to the labs” for economic salvation. Besides permanent pollution and more than 1,600 federally-documented occupational deaths, what does the region have to show for all the money and talent poured into LANL?

Labor markets are distorted as LANL absorbs scarce local talent. Housing markets are likewise bid up, and scarce resources such as water and road capacity are consumed. Taxpayers in LANL bedroom communities pay the cost of public services for LANL commuters, often with net negative fiscal impacts.

Over its history LANL has spent \$130 B in Northern New Mexico, a vast sum anywhere but especially here. Yet LANL has generated neither shared prosperity nor social development. A few have benefited economically, but most have not.

As a result, LANL drives regional inequality, with devastating social, economic, and political impacts. Perhaps worst of all, political leaders come to focus and depend on LANL and its wealthy employees – or else fear its power, exerted indirectly through political parties and organizations.

Imaginations are stifled as narrative dominance becomes complete. Political leaders become unable to “think outside the labs,” an outcome carefully engineered at taxpayer expense by LANL. Green, social goals – the antithesis of LANL’s core

missions – are derailed and deferred.

LANL suborns the attention and loyalty of our political and civic leadership and provides false, self-serving answers to



the economic, environmental and social problems we face. Instead of coming together to truly grapple with these problems, our leaders talk about LANL “jobs,” a narrative that centers our attention on LANL – not where it belongs, in our communities.

Our state & country desperately need wholesome priorities, not an arms race

How can we build strong, resilient communities with priorities such as these? How can we address the existential crisis of climate change? How can we provide a good education for all our children, and support for our elderly? How can we provide real vocations, with real meaning, for the rising generation? More war, and more preparations for nuclear war, are the opposite of any answer. The scale of these wrong-headed investments corrupts our politicians, drains our treasury, and degrades our morality, dragging down our city, our state, our country, and quite possibly our world, without even considering the rising risk of nuclear war.

NNSA needs silence and acquiescence from Santa Fe in order to continue this reckless folly. The last thing LANL and NNSA want is to have to justify their plans in public.

Meanwhile LANL hopes to subordinate our educational institutions to their needs, so our children can enter their “pipeline” of plutonium workers to be cannon fodder for dreams of world domination.

What can be done, and how you can help

LANL’s semi-secret plans are unclear even to LANL. And they are expanding. Two additional billion-dollar nuclear facilities are now planned. Once production is underway, a large new plutonium facility will also be needed soon.

According to LANL, 2,000 to 3,000 workers must soon be brought to the site daily in buses because LANL has outgrown local road capacities. Meanwhile LANL is negotiating with the Pueblos to build trailer parks for its anticipated army of construction workers.

Our Senators, Congresswoman Fernandez, and our Governor all support LANL’s new production mission without reservation, without even knowing what it entails.

Many of us have written and called these politicians for years about this program, requesting transparency and environmental analyses, both of which they oppose.

So do not bother writing them. They will pay no heed.

Given the widespread lack of knowledge we are organizing a public informational and planning meeting, to which our congressional delegation, Governor, and local leaders will be invited. Our executive director, Greg Mello, will provide an overview and take questions, as will a highly-knowledgeable expert from South Carolina.

We need a sustainable, just society that is working to address climate collapse and other crises straight on, not the moral and fiscal black hole of a new Cold War.

PLEASE COME IF YOU CAN, AND TELL YOUR FRIENDS.

Information & Planning Meeting

- Thursday, September 30th, 6:00 – 8:00 pm
- Gathering Room, St. John’s United Methodist Church in Santa Fe, 1200 Old Pecos Trail
- This is a large hall with superior ventilation. Wear a mask (as always N95 & KN95 are best).

Yes, I want to help

- I will be there on September 30th. I will recruit my friends and contacts to come.
- I endorse the “Call for Sanity, Not Nuclear Production” (see <https://lasg.org/wordpress/we-call-for-sanity-no-nuclear-production/>)
- I prefer in person events, on-line events, or neither. I might be able to help with outreach prior to events, other.
- I would like national email updates (~1x/2 weeks), New Mexico updates & invitations (~1x/week), or neither.
- I can help financially with a one-time gift, a monthly donation (see <https://lasg.org/contribute.htm>), in other ways.

Contact me by email _____ phone _____, or wait for now.

Address _____ City, State, Zip _____

Comment _____

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2901 Summit Place NE, Albuquerque, NM 87106 • 505-265-1200 • lasg.org

