

PRESS ADVISORY

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PRESS CONFERENCE: State Capital Rotunda, 11:30 am Wednesday 1/21/98

Contact: Greg Mello 982-7747

Taxpayers, Environmentalists Unite to Blast \$50 Billion In Wasteful and Destructive Federal Programs

LANL's Bottomless Plutonium 'Pits' Project on List

Top LANL Manager: "Some Things Are Just Too Expensive *Not To Do*"

SANTA FE--Organizations representing over 8.5 million environmentalists, taxpayers, and deficit hawks have joined together to urge Congress and the Clinton Administration to cut 71 projects and programs that threaten the environment and waste taxpayer dollars. The Green Scissors Campaign, led by Friends of the Earth, Taxpayers for Common Sense, the U.S. Public Interest Research Group, and 23 other organizations and numerous local groups, released its report today [1/21] showing how to save \$50 billion in wasteful federal spending *and* protect the environment.

Destructive and wasteful projects identified include those in energy and nuclear weapons, like our own plutonium "pit" factory at Los Alamos and WIPP, public lands, water "development," agriculture, transportation, and others. At least 14 of the 71 wasteful projects chosen originate in the Department of Energy.

The plutonium "pit" project at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) will spend at least \$1.1 billion to increase LANL's capability to make the plutonium cores of nuclear weapons from 20 pits per year to 50 pits per year (or 80 on a three-shift basis). The United States possesses a stockpile of about 12,000 weapons, plus an inventory of more than 10,000 excess pits, many of which can be substituted in deployed weapons if ever needed. There is no indication, however, that the existing pits will not last for at least two more decades, if not much longer. The projected cost of the project has more than tripled in the past year.

Making plutonium pits has led to some of the worst industrial accidents in U.S. history. This was the role of the Rocky Flats Plant near Denver, which was shut down in a joint EPA/FBI raid in 1989 and never reopened due to widespread environmental and safety problems. Accidents aside, the processing and manufacture of plutonium components creates large volumes of long-lived transuranic and low-level radioactive waste, the former to be shipped to WIPP on New Mexico highways and the latter to be permanently buried at LANL.

"The `science-based stockpile stewardship program' should really be renamed `*pork-based* stewardship,'" said Greg Mello, Director of the Los Alamos Study Group, a participant in the project. "This program is replete with redundancy, make-work, and contains over \$16 billion in unneeded new construction. It's not the stock*pile* that's being maintained, it's the stock*yard*."

Writing in the September 1996 issue of *Weapons Insider*, an internal LANL publication, Nuclear Weapons Program Director Dr. Steven Younger provides a different slant: "...but how will we pay for these new directions and strategic investments? It is unlikely that we will ever receive enough money to satisfy every need. So, we must look closely at our priorities but also keep in mind that some things are just too expensive *not* to do." [original emphasis]

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