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## **GAO Finds Declining Need to Manufacture Plutonium Pit “Triggers”; Nevertheless Over \$6 Billion Slated for Pit Production at Los Alamos**

Congress’ investigative agency, the Government Accountability Office (GAO), has just released a report on the future costs and need for plutonium pit “trigger” production at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL).

LANL is currently producing pits for the sub-launched W88 warhead, whose last production was abruptly shut down following a 1989 FBI raid investigating environmental crimes at the Rocky Flats Plant. **The GAO report notes that an NNSA February 2007 memo established a total production requirement of 31 W88 pits.** More importantly, the memo had no requirement for the number of pits that should be produced every year. LANL produced eleven W88 pits in FY 2007, and arguably could complete its W88 pit production mission in just two more years.

Nevertheless, **NNSA is pushing to expand pit production at Los Alamos to up to 80 pits per year** in its current proposal for “Transformation” of its nuclear weapons complex and a Site-Wide Environmental Impact Statement (SWEIS) for Continuing Operations at LANL. However, **that level of production is needed only for manufacturing new-design nuclear weapons, the so-called Reliable Replacement Warheads (RRWs).** But Congress rejected any funding for RRW in FY2008, and will likely do so again for FY 2009.

There are eight other pit types besides the W88 in the deployed nuclear weapons stockpile. The Pantex Plant near Amarillo, TX, the site of final weapons assembly, is specifically authorized to “reuse” up to 350 existing pits per year in weapons refurbishments. Pantex itself boasts how pit reuse is far less expensive and environmentally damaging than the production of new pits. Thus, **with no need to produce RRW or non-W88 pits, and only a limited set of W88 pits to produce, there is simply no need to expand beyond the currently sanctioned production level of up to 20 pits per year at LANL.**

The GAO report was prepared at the request of Congressmen Peter Visclosky and David Hobson, Chairman and Ranking Member respectively of the House Subcommittee for Energy and Water Development Appropriations. All funding for DOE’s National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) nuclear weapons programs pass through that subcommittee. GAO found that “NNSA’s plans for future pit manufacturing are still being developed and, as a result, no reliable cost estimates exist.” Nevertheless, **the report calculates that all costs related to expanding plutonium pit production at LANL over the next five years could cost more than \$6 billion.**

Jay Coghlan, Nuclear Watch Executive Director, commented, “In today’s fiscal climate this is worse than waste to put six billion taxpayer dollars into expanded nuclear weapons production that we don’t need. That money should go to where it’s really needed, into nonproliferation programs, energy independence and cleanup of a Lab that is seriously interested in embracing new missions.”

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For the GAO report “Nuclear Weapons: NNSA Needs to Establish a Cost and Schedule Baseline for Manufacturing a Critical Nuclear Weapon Component,” GAO-08-593, May 23, 2008, go to <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d08593.pdf>